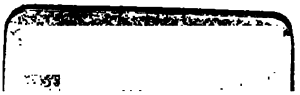
TWO OF A TRADE

By

Marlba McCullough Williams



TWO OF A TRADE

BY

MARTHA McCULLOUGH WILLIAMS

NEW YORK
J. SELWIN TAIT AND SONS
65 FIFTH AVENUE
1894

Lovingly Inscribed

TO

MRS. A. M. P.,

A LIVING EXEMPLAR, IN THE ERA OF THE NEW SOUTH,

OF THE

GRACES AND GRACIOUSNESS WHICH GLORIFIED THE OLD.

TWO OF A TRADE.

CHAPTER I.

"WHY, it's great! Superb! Immortality in a nutshell!"

And the speaker, Mr. Endymion Weeper, paced his library with stiff and measured strides that brought vividly to mind the motions of a jumping-jack. He was dark, tall, slender, and slightly bent, with an entirely correct mustache, a high, bulging forehead and prominent pale eyes, which ill-natured folk even said were fishy. But in the opinion of his Aunt Priscilla, the man did not live who was worthy to be named in the same day with her nephew.

Said Aunt Priscilla was Mr. Endymion Weeper's father's sister, a gentlewoman with high nose, and chin whose accentuated sharpness contrasted oddly with her washed-out general coloring, or rather want of it. But what Miss Priscilla lacked

of beauty she more than made up in magnificence. As she sat in the chimney corner, gazing fondly on Endymion, her satin gown rustled with each movement of her small person, and a faint tinkle of chains and bracelets emphasized every motion. At least a dozen diamonds on her skinny fingers flashed back the fire-shine. Indeed, such a sense of costliness was about her that instinctively one wondered if she dared sleep outside a burglar-proof vault.

The same affluent atmosphere breathed throughout the room, which was long and lofty, with windows of stained glass at each end, and along either side a fine array of tapestry panels encased in dark red mahogany with overlay of open brass-work. Low bookcases were crammed with rare editions —old and new. Pictures, bronzes, ivory carvings, ancient weapons and fragments of armor—indeed all the luxurious litter with which great wealth decrees its possessor shall lumber himself, was scattered about, and pervaded by an artistic note of gloom and ugliness.

The only suggestion of cheerfulness emanated from the blazing logs which crackled in the bronzed grate, and occasionally snapped a merry spark at the magnificent tiger-skin stretched be-

fore it, upon which the owner of all this luxury and fashionable gloom had just paused, repeating to himself the words:

"Glorious! Superb! Immortality in a nut-shell!"

Miss Priscilla looked at him, started apprehensively—tinkle, tinkle rang her chains—and said tentatively:

"Well?"

"Very well indeed!" echoed Endymion, drawing a step nearer and gazing upon her face. "Darling Aunt Priscilla," he continued, "although every member of our family is properly appreciative of my talents, you were the first to recognize and have been the most ardent supporter of them. It therefore seems indeed fitting that you should be first to hear that soon the world will be at my feet."

Tears came to the poor little woman's eyes. She passed a film of lace and cambric across them, assumed a painfully erect posture, flashed an extra rainbow from the big diamond on her forefinger, and said, with a slightly tremulous voice:

"Yes, I knew success would come! I have said so *all* the time, and have not lost hope if you are thirty-nine. But tell me what has happened."

"Nothing has 'happened'!" replied Endymion with a smile of superiority; "yet I fancy that five years from now there will be in existence a whole literature of this very moment!"

"I hate riddles!" Miss Priscilla exclaimed somewhat impatiently. "If you were any one but Endymion Weeper, I should say you were either insane or utterly foolish. But you must mean something. Do tell me what!"

Again Endymion smiled, in a manner designed, if possible, to show more superiority than before, took Miss Priscilla's hand, and murmured:

"Dearest aunt, you know I have long had a leaning toward literature, and——"

"'Leaning,'" interrupted Miss Priscilla; "oh, Endymion! How can you speak so lightly of your glorious gift? That one poem,

> "'O fair lily,
> Silvern, slender, silly!'

is alone enough to rank you with Swinburne and Tennyson, far above Oscar Wilde."

Endymion patted the hand he held, saying:

"The dear aunt may be a little partial, yet the verses are clever. I have done better things though, very much better; so much better, indeed,

that but for the insane prejudice in favor of writers who needs must earn a living, I should have been recognized as in the front rank of authors at least five years ago. A decently rich fellow has no chance with editors nowadays. In fact, I believe the members of the profession are leagued together to extort pay for publishing our writings."

"Yes—I also believe it," assented Miss Priscilla. "Do you remember the one who enclosed his rates per line when he returned that beautiful 'Ode to Spring,' and the other who wrote that your 'Epithalamium on General Fire-and-tow' had added a new terror to death?"

Endymion frowned, but continued: "I see through it all—the jealous spite of the masses, the envy of those who lead and control them! But soon I shall have the better of both, and I fancy that then several of those fellows will feel like kicking themselves over lost opportunities. How I shall laugh to see them, metaphorically, upon their knees, begging me to write for them. My revenge will be to send each the manuscript he previously rejected, advising him that as a great personal favor he may have it for fifty dollars per thousand words."

"Oh! that will be glorious!" exclaimed Miss

Priscilla, with sparkling eyes. "But—but—you haven't yet told me how this is to come about."

Endymion clasped his aunt's hands, drew her to her feet, and said, with a modest droop of his eye-lids:

"Look at me, auntie!"

"What for?" Miss Priscilla asked a trifle tartly.

Endymion smiled as he answered:

"Oh, nothing, perhaps—now; but after a while I fancy you will be besieged by a host of people who wish to know how a man looked and acted when he made the greatest literary discovery of his century."

Miss Priscilla gazed critically at her nephew for a moment, and then replied:

"I should say you look as usual—possibly a little wild about the eyes; and—and your nose is red there," touching it, "just at the tip; but aside from those two points I'm sure no one who knew you would think anything had happened."

This loving aunt could not, would not, dream that Endymion, her model, was perpetrating a vulgar hoax, especially about anything so vital as his own literary career. But she was more than a little mystified. It was a genuine relief when her nephew said:

"Thank Heaven! I feared it was plainly written on my face. Had that been so, I should have felt compelled to isolate myself like a hermit until this golden opportunity could be realized."

"Will you tell me what you mean—what you are driving at—what this great discovery really is?" Miss Priscillla spoke impetuously, her face beginning to show signs of agitation.

Endymion replaced his aunt in the chair, which he turned slightly, permitting her to face him, and said in a low tone:

"It is this, Aunt Priscilla. The novelist must write as the painter paints, from the living model."

Miss Priscilla arose precipitately, exclaiming:

"Don't, Endymion! Don't! I wouldn't have you do it—not for anything. I would rather you never became distinguished than to mix with those dreadful models. After all, rich as we are, our name is good enough—and I'm sure we've a right to our crest, for father's mother's great-uncle was a Church of England clergyman. Consider what we have to lose—and those creatures——"

"Dear aunt, do you think a Weeper could ever forget himself?"

"N—o," replied Miss Priscilla; "but a man is very apt to, when there's a pretty woman about.

You can't write a book without pretty women figuring in it, can you?" Miss Priscilla asked doubtfully.

Endymion laughed aloud, saying: "Beauty—mere beauty—is out of fashion, dear aunt, quite out of the running. We go in nowadays for a different sort of thing. I certainly shall not try to write ignoring woman, but she will be to me, as she is to any true artist, only a model—a thing of curves, and colors, and emotions, to be studied, represented, and—appreciated"—stumbling a little at the last word.

"Ah! appreciated! That's what I'm afraid of—I tell you it's dangerous!" snapped Miss Priscilla, with an energetic movement which caused her ornaments to jingle.

But the nephew had taken refuge in a silence whose obstinacy she knew but too well, and rising she rustled through the door, which he dutifully held open.

Hardly had the sound of her movements died away ere the future great novelist again began pacing the room. It was distinctly hard lines, he felt, to be thus chilled and misunderstood in the first glow of discovery; to be thus rasped with a senseless objection now that his foot was firmly

planted upon the ladder of fame. Women—models, forsooth! He laughed at the thought of danger in them to him, who knew equally the great world and the half-world of two continents, and who had successfully run the gantlet of feminine charms from New York to Vienna and St. Petersburg. He was known in all the round world as equally a connoisseur of nature and of art in undress. Yet nothing unpleasant had ever come of it: he was too level-headed.

That, though he did not say it, came with his blood. The first Weeper of all had demonstrated it when he put into corner lots the profits of his corner grocery, and thus assured fortune to his descendants.

None of the race had fallen away from ancestral thrift. Most of them, indeed, had paid such attention to their investments that they had taken no time in which to provide themselves with husbands or wives. Endymion, the one grandson of the house, was heir-presumptive to wealth almost fabulous.

As such he had been bred and trained in a fashion to make him even a more incomparable ass than when he left nature's hand. From his earliest years those about him had spoken and acted as

though the design of creation had been to prepare a stage for the ultimate Weeper existence.

Robust conceit has a certain antiseptic quality. Thus it was that the heir of all the Weepers turned away from woman's wiles and affected literature. His race, the Weeper race, was, he felt, in need only of distinction. Through letters they could safely gain it. Civic honors were not for men too honest for aldermen, too thrifty for statesmen. The law meant years of drudgery; medicine, dangers dire; commerce, risks uninviting to men of assured income. When Weeper, the novelist, had the ears of two continents, the race which produced him would indeed find itself exalted.

CHAPTER II.

"IMMORTALITY in a nutshell," Mr. Weeper repeated, smiling almost sardonically at a photograph of Tolstoï, which, framed in ebony, stood on the lid of his open desk. Only desk and photograph knew fully the strain to which the owner of both had often subjected the commonwealth's English. In this, his hour of triumph, it seemed to Mr. Weeper that a look of bewilderment stole into the great Russian's pictured face—as though the carved griffins on either side were whispering in malicious glee:

"The mighty is fallen, fallen! Tolstoï was great, his glory has departed! Behold, a greater than Tolstoï is here!"

Was it wholly fancy, the suspicion that a look of semi-human apprehension appeared on Mr. Howell's photographed countenance which hung just above? Certainly a startled expression was apparent, as though the subject had been rudely aroused from contemplation of himself. Mr. Weeper, looking at the pair, almost winked, but

was restrained by a realization that such a thing would savor of ungenerous exultation over those he was about to dethrone.

Up to the present hour both had been the gods of his idolatry. Naturally he still kept some poor shred and tatter of reverence for them. But of course it was impossible that he should do farther homage even to gods whom he was about to supersede. The day of worship had passed into the night of action. Sinking into a chair, Mr. Endymion Weeper elevated his heels upon the desk and proceeded to ruminate on life and literature.

The exigencies of plot gave him no concern. Instead, his anxiety was to find something full of life and color and fourth-proof emotion, something which should begin and end nowhere in particular, but have deep psychological significance in every line.

Ah! thoughts began to come. A tall, golden-haired girl—she need not be beautiful—the hair is of chief importance—she must be slender as a lily—and blooming lily-like in the mire of poverty. Let her suddenly hear that she is heir to wealth—not in round figures, but so vague as to be full of Aladdin's-lamp possibilities.

This wealth must come to her from some miss-

ing kinsman—father, uncle, brother—who had won it in—say California? No, the Argonauts of '49 had too chestnutty a flavor for such *fin de siècle* romance. Australia was more promising, but rather out of touch; besides Australia also had been terribly over-exploited. As for Chicago, the fire and the pork market were circumstances not to be ignored—the newspapers paid quite too much attention to whatever concerned either. English estates in Chancery were not portable, as this fortune must be. Castles in Germany or in Spain were likewise out of court. India? Kipling was in the way there. South Africa? The very thing! For there lay diamond-fields, the chosen home of romantic happenings! Thence, too, might come a bronzed and bearded miner, who would play good genius to beauty in distress.

He must bring her fortune in diamonds—in a buckskin bag sewed inside his bootleg. No, that would be quite too simple: no chance at all for effect, though you might distill a couple of chapters from the emotion he would experience at yielding his trust into the hands even of its rightful owner.

Much better have him wrecked on the homeward voyage, say on some sand-spit of the Jersey

coast. Of course he would bury the treasure to save it from wreckers, who even in this day are known to sometimes make an end of folk who might ask impertinent questions. Poor as honest, he had not been able to search properly for the owner of the gems, and until she was found thought it best to leave them undisturbed. Once in communication with her, what so easy as to equip a searching party and go by night to find and recover them?

Yes, it must be by night. Heavens! what a chance for magnificent writing! Still, starlit sky, muffled oars, low lights shining red across the wet sand, quaint, rude speech of the miner and sailors, noise of pick and shovel, artless talk of the golden-haired girl, who of course would accompany them and sit "gleaming nodulent" in the prow, then cry aloud—yes, half-swoon with delight—when at last the damp treasure-trove should be placed in her hands.

The tale must, it would be thrilling—even to the one who had seen that the treasure was so buried as to be conveniently found. Mr. Endymion Weeper was more than in love with his scheme, and must at once manipulate the wires that would place it in the way of happening. Of course only

the beginning was as yet outlined; but it was not his place to devise new complications; that would be like the mere ordinary romance. Once matters were fairly in train, the complexity of human nature would surely keep them going—to goodness knows what delicious end.

Mr. Weeper's whole duty now was to take that first step which counts, to find and move to action the people of his fancy. They certainly existed, not perhaps exactly in the order and correlation of his romance, but near enough to serve the purpose; and it was unnecessary to go mooning over half the world for them. New York, he was fully persuaded, could supply whatever was demanded, if only advertised for in the right way.

Next morning the personal columns of all the leading dailies held the two following paragraphs, which few readers fancied had any connection with each other:

"A TALL, GOLDEN-HAIRED woman, under twenty-five years of age, having a missing relative unheard of for years, may learn of something to her advantage by addressing X. L. N. T., Box 11, 10,009 Broadway."

"WANTED.—Man, above thirty, who has been in South Africa and knows something of the dia-

mond-fields. Tall, bearded person, with large scar preferred. Must have an honest, open countenance, and be able to speak fluently of camp and mining life. Call Wednesday between 4 and 5 P.M. on 'Patron of Art,' 709 West — St., New York City."

Mr. Weeper read them over two or three times, a smile—his very best smile, partly of joy, partly of pity for the purblind mortals who could not read between the lines—playing over his features. He was not much given to soliloquy, rarely lacking an interested auditor in Aunt Priscilla. But to-day he rejoiced that she still held aloof, and he could say out of a full heart, "The French proverb declares 'Opportunity has no back hair.' Now, when the breath of genius has blown its forefront into my hand, shall I not lay hold upon and keep it until the nineteenth century owns me its lord and king?"

CHAPTER III.

Of course Mr. Weeper did not wish his models to know who he really was. Naturally, 709 West — Street was not the Weeper homestead, but a vacant house which served admirably for his great experiment. It galled the experimenter not a little to reflect that while copyright can protect a book, a picture, even a mere title—he could claim no shadow of it for this the century's greatest idea, but must rely wholly upon discreet secrecy if he were to first exploit it.

However, as there was no help for the matter, Mr. Weeper bravely made the best of it, hired a new lightning stenographer, had a phonograph with blank cylinders ambushed behind a screen at the right of his desk, sank his own radiant personality in the commonplace of "E. Weep, Counselor at Law," and sat down to await the appearance of the folk who were to help him on to glory.

The future great novelist was not wholly unsupported. Besides the consciousness of a great deed,

he had his own man, Muttons, a special importation, who was not on speaking terms with the letter "H." There was the caretaker, too, who had at one time been a housemaid in the Weeper's service, but was now a globular epitome of devotion to the heir of the house. Without her Counselor Weep would have felt a bit nervous.

Golden-haired girls, it was evident, were more plentiful than black-haired ones. No less than a dozen had written in diverse strains. The diamond-miner, though, was as yet an unknown quantity. Until certain that he would materialize, Mr. Weep did not know just what could be said to his dozen of waiting women.

He was not long left in doubt. The clock was barely upon the stroke of four when Muttons ushered into his master's presence a stout, muscular fellow, rather above the middle size, who stood upon a pair of very bow legs and was redolent of tar, tobacco, and onions.

Three hitches and a roll brought him to the middle of the room, where he stopped short, spat upon the floor, and rumbled out through his covert of prickly red beard:

"Say, mister, is it cannybals?"

"Cannibals?"

This echo of the interrogation was all to which Counselor Weep was equal.

The newcomer continued:

"Cannybals is what I said; but maybe it's er stairyopticon ye want ter run. It stands ter reason you're in the museum line, for who else in creation would be a-wantin' a man whut knowed Africky?"

"Africa! ah—you have been there, then?"

"Well! I sh'd say—some."

"What part?"

"Nigh all of 'em. Whut's more I've been a Hottentot right here in New York, only quit last month fer strictly privit reasons, all me own. I knowed I wus your meat the minit I sot eyes on your handbill. You won't have no trouble about the drill, neither expense. I fetched away me costyume from t'other place. See! Aint it er jimdandy?"

Even as the man spoke an eruption of pockets broke out all over him, from which the accredited garments of Zululand rained upon the floor. Dashing down his hat, and with it his fleece of red beard, the newcomer caught the feather helmet, tossed it jauntily upon his head, flung some skins about his middle, extricated a war-club from its ambush of coat-tails and began to brandish it, hopping now

on one foot, now on the other, and shouting in deep chest tones:

"Qua haug! wauk, waukee, tam—bung—wang —teeze — weeze — meumbo—urembo—bish—wing — mity — kang — bacaracaca — white m-a-n-'-s b-l-o-o-d! Ugh!" ending staccato in a long drawn howl.

"That's me war-r-song, the fust end of it," he said, wiping his forehead. "Ef only I had the dye on now, I'd get out o' these here trousers and show ye a real war-r-dance, too."

"I—I—that is—you are mistaken—quite. Muttons, show this gentleman out," Counselor Weep finally managed to interpolate.

The ex-Zulu glared at him fiercely:

"Do ye mean ter tell me?" he asked in fine wrath, "that you and that thar beefy Britisher, when neither o' ye ever seed so much as the wool of a Bushman, set yourselves up ter know more and better about 'em than me that has eat, and slept, and fought alongside of 'em? Why, I tell yer, me and Chief Mungwubeezeewuzzy drank blood brotherhood together, and all the common sort o' blacks allowed that while the dye lasted I wus every bit as good a Hottentot as him."

"No doubt of it—not the least," said Counselor

Weep, who had by this time sufficiently recovered to smile amiably on his queer caller. "But, see here, my good man, you had better go. I want a person who has memories of Africa without its manners."

"Then, perhaps, I have not come in vain," said a voice at the door. Glancing up, Counselor Weep saw the caretaker lightly propelling toward him a tall, pale, melancholy personage, with long, lean hands and a manner much too worldly for the saintly tones of his voice.

Mungwubeezeewuzzy's blood brother started back, crying, "Slippery Jim—er his ghost!"

The newcomer gave him a long stare, then said, as their eyes parted:

"Not a ghost, by any means, my friend; but a poor worm of the dust, who hopes and tries to act well his humble part."

Counselor Weep was impressed; but the ex-Zulu laughed immoderately, then ambushed himself in the red beard and rolled away.

When the last-comer was put through his South African paces, it soon became evident he must win, hands down.

Kraals, the veldt, gemsboks, hartebeests, trek-king, out-spanning, and much more of the sort

came trippingly from his tongue. Mashona and Matabele lands were evidently as familiar to him as his native Connecticut, which he had left as a missionary to return a conscientious agnostic. The diamond-fields evidently were no more mysterious to him than the Bowery—hardly as much so, indeed, though he hinted delicately that in the course of certain rescue excursions many of its darker spots had become intimately known.

Certainly if the man did not speak truth he had crammed amazingly, and to good purpose. Counselor Weep would not for a minute harbor so vile a suspicion as deceit. Unless the tale was genuine, why was he, Weep, so moved by it? Why was Muttons, usually the most wooden of decorous serving-men, drinking in, open-mouthed, the quaint recital? As for the lightning stenographer, spite of his curves and dashes, and the burden of extreme accuracy laid on him by the Counselor, he dropped his pencil more times than one, and had much ado to keep from tying himself into knots over the humorous parts of the man's story.

By his own account Mr. Lysander Bangs had several times placed a girdle around the earth, and in so doing had of course seen something of life; but the best, the strangest of all his experiences

was those five years at the diamond diggings, where almost every day ran the whole gamut of passion.

Counselor Weep rubbed his hands rejoicingly. Here was convincing proof of the worth of his inspired thought. In Lysander Bangs a mine of experience lay waste. It was for Counselor Weep to work it, to mint and market the gold of action. But Bangs must be kept in the dark as to what was really wanted. Waving him toward the inner office, Counselor Weep carefully closed the door and said reflectively:

"I—a—Mr. Bangs, it appears that—that you may serve my turn—but before we go farther, tell me, on your honor, can you keep a secret?"

"I have kept—several," Bangs replied, with a peculiar smile.

"And you are willing to risk keeping one more?"

"A dozen, if it should be worth my while."

"Even if—you see, this concerns a woman?"

"I was certain of that from the first."

"Ah! But it is not as you think—as a man of the world, perhaps, must think. I am purely a philanthropist—hidden, may be, but sincere."

"Indeed! And is the secret a philanthropic one?"

"In a measure, yes. The case stands thus: I

know a woman, a young woman, who is greatly in need of a little of the—well, dross, that I can very well spare. A—relative of hers, one who would certainly care for her if living, was last heard of at the diamond-fields. Now, if you are given his name and a few other points, do you think you can manage to remember him as a successful diamond miner?"

"Perfectly—but——"

"But how will that help her you were going to ask. Listen! He died there just after his lucky find, leaving in your charge jewels to be given this young woman at your earliest convenience. Of course you accepted the trust, and started for home to discharge it. On the way you were shipwrecked, say on the Jersey Coast, and buried your treasure for fear of losing it or suffering salvage. Then you came to the city and engaged me as your lawyer to find the heiress, whose name you had, strange to say, forgotten. When I discover the young woman, may I trust that you will go with us to recover her inheritance?"

Lysander Bangs almost whistled. "That is a plan!" he said, dropping his eyes. "But, see here; do you expect any sane person will believe that betwixt mosquitoes, and clam-diggers, and Jerseymen

generally anything worth a copper would stay three days in Jersey sand? Why, once I—never mind! What I mean is, men have buried things which could not be found when they went to look for them; but I never yet heard of finding what never had been concealed."

Counselor Weep's superior smile was beautiful to behold.

"Trust me for that," he said. "It is the pivotal point. Delicacy forbids the young woman to take money from a family friend; how much more, then, from a philanthropic stranger? But she will be more than glad of this legacy of rough gems, which money can buy. Do you begin to understand?"

"I—think so," Bangs answered, with a peculiar inflection of voice. Then he inquired: "When am I to see this very fortunate young woman?"

"I cannot say precisely; within a day or two, I think," replied Counselor Weep, with a return to his most legal manner.

"Ah!"—still the rising inflection. "Meantime would you not better give me the relative's name, so I can begin to fit it into my memories?"

"It has slipped my mind. Jobson—Dobson—no, perhaps it's Smith? I must consult my mem-

oranda, but you shall have it before to-morrow night," Counselor Weep said, unblushingly. In behalf of his great idea he had a courage of mendacity that bordered on the sublime.

Mr. Bangs handed over a flamboyant card. "Now as to terms——"

"Make them yourself, sir; you will find that I know how to be both just and generous," Counselor Weep observed, eying askance the cheap pasteboard and fancy lettering.

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure," said Bangs imperturbably. "Philanthropy so rank as yours usually chokes out the weaker virtues. Considering the wear and tear of conscience, I must have five hundred dollars, for which I engage to remember your protégée's family way back to Adam, if necessary."

A rap, then through a crack in the door Muttons murmured plaintively, "H'if you please, sir, there's nine more h'Africans, three with wool h'on their 'eads, and what will h'I tell them h'is your pleasure?"

"That they came too late, but may each have the price of a beer for their trouble," Counselor Weep replied, with a lofty wave of dismissal.

Lysander Bangs stood not upon the order of his

going, but went, and once clear of the house, looked back, saying to himself:

"Lysander, lad, you fancied you knew the genus fool by heart; but, my boy, you have stumbled on a wholly new variety."

CHAPTER IV.

AT nine o'clock next day Counselor Weep sat in his inner room upon the tingling edge of expectancy. A landslide of golden-haired girls was imminent; he had asked all but two of the dozen respondents to call, ignoring one whose epistle began "Deer Sur," and one who wrote a small "i" for the first person singular.

Muttons had orders to seat respondents in the ante-room, with any family Cerberi who might accompany them, whence they could be ushered *seriatim* to front Fate in the inner one. Thus no awkwardness would follow even if they came in a shoal. Indeed, Counselor Weep hoped they would, and thus give him choice of the lot. He would not hesitate to send away even a promising personality, if a glance outside could assure him of better in reserve.

Most of the letters had been unremarkable save for their brief business tone. There was one, though—a black-bordered, heart-broken little note,

signed "Aline," that had somewhat impressed even Counselor Weep's unsusceptible imagination. The writer, he was sure, must have a history—a mystery, it might be—well worth the finding out. While he was speculating over it, the doorbell began ringing in a way to quite discount a burglar-alarm. A minute later Muttons brought in a trayful of cards, saying:

"H'if you please, sir, 'ere's seven ladies, h'all come h'at once. Which will h'it please you to see first?"

"This," Counselor Weep said, tapping a black-edged card, whereon his eye had caught "Aline" pencilled below the printed "Miss James."

Miss James came, redolent with the odor of crape and violets. She was not merely tall, but all the dimensions of extension were represented in her figure. As to complexion, it was exactly that of a badly boiled dumpling; her features looked as if they had been molded of dough and had risen grotesquely in the baking. But she had heavenly blue eyes, and hair of the palest gold piled high in a rippling, wavy mass underneath her trifle of a black bonnet. When within two feet of Counselor Weep she stopped, threw back her veil with a dramatic gesture, and said in a limp voice:

"At last my dream soul meets its mate!"

"Miss—ah—h—James?" ejaculated the Counselor.

"No, no—'Aline'—always 'Aline'—to you," she responded, laying her large right hand on the Counselor's arm. Before he could utter a word, she continued: "Believe me, I am not dull and gross. You have read my poems, have inquired as to their writer, and chose this delicately impersonal way of calling me to you."

"But—but—did you see—I advertised for—surely you have no missing relative?" Counselor Weep gasped rather than spoke, so great was his perturbation and discomfort.

Miss James smiled indulgently. "Indeed I have," she replied. "Of course I intended to tell you, but you are such an impatient dear! I am an only child, orphaned, and brought up by doting grandparents. Five years ago grandmother died; six weeks later grandfather disappeared. The cook went too, and there are people base enough——"

"Ah! excuse me—but how old was your grandfather?" Counselor Weep asked, retreating to the wall.

"He was almost seventy. You see there could

have been no foundation for that vile insinuation!" Miss James sank into a chair and began to mop her eyes.

"Then—I regret to say you cannot be the—the person I am in search of," Counselor Weep eagerly exclaimed.

"Why not?" peremptorily questioned Miss James, immediately assuming a stiff and upright posture.

"Because—I—you see, it's a matter of inheritance, and the testator died when he was but fifty years old," the Counselor answered, hugging himself over that lucky loophole.

Aline sank back and sobbed: "Wretch! Traitor! Base deceiver! How dare you raise my hopes thus, to nip—them—in the—bud?"

"Calm yourself, Miss James, and please inform me just what you came here to find," Counselor Weep said in his most suave manner.

There was vicious lightning in the large blue eyes as the fair Aline answered:

"At least a gentleman, if not my twin soul; one who—would not—be—utterly insensible to—womanly distress."

Counselor Weep smiled the very ghost of a smile. Miss James was forty if a day; fat as well,

and wholly impossible in any light. But he returned, blandly:

"Sorry for your disappointment, madam, but really I am not to blame that you looked for a lover and found only a lawyer. Now, I must really ask you to let me see the rest of the possible heiresses."

Miss James arose, exclaiming:

"Ah, I see your plot! You are mercenary—lying in wait to entrap some poor young woman who has money! My last word is"—she raised her hand and shook one fat forefinger threateningly—"beware!" Then this golden-haired woman tragically crossed the room and vanished through the doorway.

Instantly a vivacious figure darted forward, pirouetted in front of the Counselor, and said, balancing upon one foot:

"Well, fairy godfather, how do you think I'll do for Cinderella?"

Cunning shone in this woman's eye, blondine was on her hair, and the breath of cigarette smoke permeated all her garments. Before Mr. Weep could speak she continued glibly:

"Soon as I seen your ad I sez to ma, sez I, 'That's all rot, the missing relative—if it isn't,

sure I was born missing the most o' mine. I'll bet it's some manager as wants t' engage a troupe of dizzy blondes on the dead quiet, and sure as my name is Golden Slippers, I've a mind to whack up to him and see what he's made of.' "

"You might have saved yourself the trouble;" Counselor Weep spoke stiffly.

"You don't even want to see me, eh? Well, 'pon me soul, you've got the best of it! you ain't no charmer yourself," Golden Slippers retorted, with another whirl. Then, still more airily: "But don't you think you ought to stand a beer and me car fare? It ain't much fun coming to such a poky old hole at this ungodly time o' day."

Counselor Weep held out a dollar, which the dancer clutched with a famished eagerness pitiful to behold. "Ta-ta, godfather. I'll drink success to your little game," she said, her voice running into a queer, husky treble at the last word. As she turned to leave, Counselor Weep said:

"Come back."

The girl paused, but averted her face until he came and stood beside her. Then she looked up, and he saw that tears were dimming the cunning eyes, and that a desperate thinness lay under rouge and powder.

"I'm afraid you are—hungry," he said in a very low tone, thrusting a gold piece in her hand. "Go home now; eat and rest. Next week send me your address. Something may come up for you, after all."

Without a word the poor creature went away—all bravado broken down by the touch of human kindness.

Unwonted tumult reigned in the breast of the man she left. He had seen her sort by hundreds, had laughed at or with them—how many nights? But, some way, never before had he discerned what bitter root of cold, hunger, nakedness often flowered into such folly. To him who had lacked for nothing came with the shame of a blow the real knowledge that even the lightest of womankind should really want bread. The shock relegated his present quest to the background for a full minute. Indeed, the time might have been longer but for Muttons, who came in, saying:

"H'if you please, sir, 'ere's h'a new person h'as will not sit down with the rest."

"Person, indeed, forsooth! Minion, how dare you! You will rue this hour! But give room—let me approach me deliverer! I could fall and

wor-r-ship at his feet," cried the newcomer, making a dash at Counselor Weep which obliged him to retreat behind his desk.

The Counselor was growing nervous; so nervous, in fact, that he felt it would be easier to face real Zulus than the remainder of his feminine contingent.

The card handed him read, "Miss Lenore de Courcy St. Maur." With a glance at it, the Counselor said in his dryest professional voice:

"Miss—ah-h—De Maur—St. Norah, I mean—was—ah-h—your brother's—name John?"

"Brother? Hear him, ye gods! He seeks to trifle, fearing to dazzle me with this too sudden splendor. Listen. No ties hamper me. Genius is my mother; fame, my brother, husband, lover; you are my pathway—my royal road to all! Do not deny yourself farther. I know you are Firesmith, the dramatist, and that you seek the grace, fire, soul—the hair, to properly impersonate your latest golden heroine. I saw your personal—came hither, and together we will conquer a world which shall belong to both. I yearn to begin. Tell me, oh, tell me, when may I set foot on the path to glory?"

As the last word was uttered she fell upon her

knees, threw off her bonnet, and a truly golden fleece rippled down to the carpet.

Counselor Weep was delightfully perplexed. The woman was slight, not ill-looking, and reasonably tall. With such emotional capacity she would unquestionably make a telling model; yet in some way a suspicion of unveracity suggested itself to the Counselor's mind. She was certainly wonderfully picturesque in that kneeling attitude, with two lily-white hands pressed lightly above her swelling heart. Indeed, she was too picturesque. Literature, he must remember, forbade the broad effects natural to the stage.

Yet he stepped forward to raise her, and might have spoken—Heaven knows what, but a slim, white hand touched the bowed head, and a cooing voice said softly:

"Oh! What a lovely pose! But your wig is a little to one side; let me straighten it, and then you will do for the Blessed Damozel."

CHAPTER V.

MISS ST. MAUR scrambled up, clutched her chevelure, and hissed in most tragic fashion, "W-r-etch! Traitor!"

But that could not blind Counselor Weep to the glimpse of a shorn poll under the golden fleece. He called rather sharply:

"Muttons, show this lady out." Then turned to the newcomer, who faced him with a merry smile, saying:

"Will you please tell me, sir, if you want more than one model?"

"What makes you think I want even one?" the Counselor queried, running an eye of approval over the tall, well-formed, graceful figure before him.

The woman's face, though not beautiful, was expressive and fine of line. There were shifting yellow-green lights in the deeply fringed eyes that looked out from beneath arched brows and broad forehead surmounted by a crown of reddish-golden hair. The possessor of these attractions smiled, with a suspicion of archness, as she answered:

"O, I am wise in the way of the artistic Egyptians!"

"Indeed! Do I look like an artist?"

"No—not exactly: that is, not like an ordinary one. But you are, I fancy, rather out of the common, and so chose an uncommon way of finding what you want."

"H-e-m! May I inquire—that is—are you—would you serve as a model—under exceptional conditions?"

Mr. Weep was oddly embarrassed. Again the lady smiled:

"I have been one for five years," she replied, dropping her eyes.

Mr. Weep asked eagerly:

"Before that—what?"

"Good days, indeed! We lived at home—father, Jack and I—on a rambling country place, read or rode, sketched or dawdled, just as best suited."

"Ah! May I inquire why you gave up such an Arcadian existence?"

"It gave me up. Father died, and his annuity with him. Jack went away to seek his fortune, and I came—here."

"Miss—Miss Dalton," glancing at the card: "I was sure at first sight that you were the person I

sought. One question, please; what was Jack's full name?"

"John Gardiner Dalton."

"When did you last receive a letter from him?"

"About five—no, four and a half years ago."

"Where was he then?"

"In New York, preparing to join an expedition to Africa."

"That settles the matter! Now we stand on sure ground! I have news for you—news both good and bad. Your brother is dead, at least such is the presumption, based, of course, upon strong proof. But—but he left enough money to make it unnecessary for you to ever again be a model."

"Indeed!"

Miss Dalton uttered only that one word. Counselor Weep was aghast! He had expected tears, exclamations, possibly a faint; certainly something beyond indifferent silence, which, however, suddenly gave place to smothered exclamations.

Dropping into a chair, the woman hid her face in a handkerchief and sat motionless, with bowed head, while Mr. Weep somewhat lamely recited the tale of Lysander Bangs and his trust. When it was finished she glanced up, saying:

"That is a remarkable story."

"So remarkable it must be true! No romancer could possibly have imagined it," Mr. Weep said, bowing.

The woman shook her head.

"I hardly agree with you," she rejoined. "There must be some strange mistake."

"Indeed! Why?"

"Oh! Because my John Dalton—he is my husband, not my brother—did not go to Africa after all. He only threatened to do so in order to bring me to my senses. Having always supposed that I should be an heiress at my father's death, and being quite romantic, I dreaded to become a burden to Jack—fearing a wife might ruin his career, and so refused him. But the refusal bade fair to bring about the result I had feared a penniless marriage would, so I finally said yes. Since then we have not been separated more than a day at a time, which accounts, you see, for his not having written for so long. And truly I have been a model all these years—but my husband is the one artist who has painted me."

For a minute wrath held Mr. Weep utterly speechless. Then he said with ironic politeness:

"Madam, will you be good enough to tell me why you came here?"

"With pleasure. You see we, Jack and I, are very fond of studying human nature, especially its queer side, and often look over the personal columns, speculating as to what lies back of the 'interesting' advertisements. Many, of course, are not riddles at all; but yours was such an odd, harmless, lunatic sort of thing that Jack consented to my really coming and, if possible, solving it. He is waiting for me in a carriage just around the corner, and my maid is outside, so you see I would have been in no danger, even had this been a lion's den."

"I hope that next time you will choose some trifler for your—experiment, which would doubtless render it more interesting, and not a serious person with a serious purpose," Mr. Weep exclaimed dramatically.

Mrs. Dalton dropped a courtesy and floated away, leaving him red, limp and sore as man could well be.

"Muttons," he called, "some sherry and bitters, quick." Then, addressing the stenographer: "Say to those—persons outside that I can see no one for the next half hour."

Counselor Weep was like an alchemist who has evoked unknown forces which he is unable to

control. Vain was his hope of respite. Scarcely had his command been issued when the door was thrown wide open, revealing Mrs. Benson's, the caretaker's, ponderous outlines, and a small, slight creature who was almost huddling under her arm. Closing the door with a bang, Mrs. Benson marched up to her young master, saying:

"Master Weep, it's a shame, that's what it is—all them big, tall, tiptoey sort pushin' an' crowdin' in to see you, an' this pore young thing not gettin' no show at all! An' she that soft an' pretty spoken, an' can't wait no longer, so I had the manners to fetch her in, sir, as I knew you'd be wishful I should."

"Ah-h—yes—yes, very good; Benson, you may retire; this business is private," Counselor Weep said, fully comprehending that curiosity more than courtesy had brought the good dame upon the scene of action.

She cast a withering glance at the stenographer, sniffed audibly, and was walking away when her convoy said imperatively:

"Please stay. I don't mind who knows I'm divorced. I suppose," to the Counselor, "I have to tell all about myself?"

Looking down at her, that gentleman found

himself fronting a pair of liquid, wide-open, near-sighted eyes which gave an impression of taking in very much of what they rested upon. They were set wide apart, under a smooth, white forehead, and shone above softly dimpled cheeks of a pale, wholesome rose tint. As a whole, her face gave no suggestion of the incisive hardness of voice and manner.

Counselor Weep's already shaken nerves grew yet more riotous under her long, sidewise glance. She stood quite still, with hands clasped before her —a trim, tailor-made figure with some silver chains and danglers depending at her left side. The lowest strand supported a set of thin, silver-backed ivory tablets, and toward it the lady's small hand crept as Counselor Weep spoke.

"Er—well," he said, as though ruminating deeply. "Frankness is desirable; but the first—the main thing—is—to find out—if—if you are really the young woman for whom I advertised."

"H-m-m! Do you want just one particular person? I judged from the advertisement that any one person of—of—a particular sort would answer," said Mrs. Benson's protégée, raising her round chin a trifle higher.

"She might—and she might not," Mr. Weep

said desperately, his whole consciousness writhing away from this small, judicial personage who eyed him as though to leave nothing, even in the very depths of his soul, unseen. "You see," he continued, "I am following a blind, a very blind clue, in hopes of doing justice, and must be very careful not to commit a great injustice."

"Oh! that's it! I see." The young woman spoke meditatively, turning and fingering her tablets.

Mr. Weep made a pretence of consulting memoranda on his desk, and seizing the opportunity she raised both hands, and shielding a tablet with her hollowed palm, wrote quickly upon it:

"*May be either great fanatic or criminal. Looks wild, like a dog that knows he has been in mischief and wants to run away.*"

When Counselor Weep turned again toward the woman, the little hand fell by her side in the most natural manner possible, and Eden's innocence was not franker than were her eyes. He drew forward a chair, saying:

"Pray make yourself comfortable, madam. I fear we have a tedious explanation to go through with. Will you please tell me briefly who and what you are? Also, what induced you to come here to-day?"

"The fact that I am not rich, but would very much like to be so—that is what 'something to your advantage' usually means, I believe—should answer your last question," the lady said, with a low laugh.

Her voice was almost delightful, with more than a suggestion of culture, but marred by a slight twang.

Counselor Weep smiled in return, saying:

"In this case, which I hope is yours, it certainly does."

Mrs. Benson interposed. "Dear sur, Master Weep, I haven't told the pretty creetur's name! She's Mrs. Bascom; but, dear knows, I think she won't be long, if men ain't changed mightily since my young days!"

"It's women who have changed," Mrs. Bascom said, with a smile; then, shaking her head, "No, Mrs. Benson, wish me anything but a husband. The one I had was good enough; but oh, it was so tiresome to see him three times a day the whole year round!"

"H-m! May I ask if he is the 'missing relative?'" Counselor Weep interjected, almost rubbing his hands with delight.

In Mrs. Bascom he had found character indeed.

This small, pretty creature, who could tranquilly discuss her marital infelicity with a chance acquaintance! What eyes she had too! What lips! What superb command of herself! There was no trace of tremor in the calm voice, which said:

"Oh, dear, no! I know all about him—though I've no doubt John would leave me a fortune if he had it. I was thinking of my uncle Antony—I am named for him, Antonia Devoe—who went away when I was ten years old, and always said I should be his heiress. But it can't be that you have heard of him?"

"It is the impossible which happens," Counselor Weep said oracularly; then launched bravely into the epic of Bangs and the fate of the late Antony Devoe.

Mrs. Bascom listened with sparkling eyes and changing color; yet she pestered him with questions so shrewd and searching as sometimes almost to take away his breath. But if she drove him into discrepancies, she seemingly took no note of the fact.

Before they parted it was fully agreed that Mrs. Bascom was the rightful heiress to the buried fortune, whose recovery, however, must wait the coming of warmer weather. It could not long be

delayed, Counselor Weep assured her, beaming at the thought of what treasures of unchecked emotion his phonograph and stenographer had imprisoned. The Counselor felt that he had been marvellously assisted. His lucky star had guided exactly the right person to fill out the wonderful plan. Mrs. Bascom would be available for so much—even the love-making—which hitherto he had seriously contemplated turning over to the stenographer and his best girl.

Now he realized that while they no doubt might be stirred by humanity's primal emotion, the manifestations of it through such channels must necessarily be crude, raw, dull. Not so with this sparkling creature, who now and then really spoke in epigram. There was quite a tinge of reality in Mr. Weep's parting assurance that henceforward all things to him would be secondary to the cultivation of her acquaintance.

Mrs. Bascom departed with Benson in her wake. Outside the door she stopped, felt for her tablets, several leaves of which had by this time been closely written over, and further inscribed the Delphic utterance, "*Between two fools, the greater fool runs least risk.*"

CHAPTER VI.

HARDLY had Counselor Weep disposed of the light luncheon for which his wrestle with romance had made him sharp-set, when Muttons' voice, raised in altercation outside, showed that affairs had taken a new turn.

"The h'audience h'is h'over—'e told me so 'isself—'e can't see nothing nor nobody more," the faithful creature loudly asserted.

A derisive laugh and approaching heavy footfall was the reply vouchsafed. Flinging open the door, the valet cried out:

"Master Weep, 'ere's that h'old female h'as sat 'ere spying h'on you to-day till I took h'it upon me duty to put 'er h'outside. She's h'along of h'a person h'in plain clothes h'as swears 'e's got h'authority to come hi'n 'ere hi'n spite of me teeth."

"And he just has, Johnny Bull, ye can gamble on that," said the intruder, a sleek fellow, but beetle-browed, to whose arm clung a thin, vinegar-faced person in widow's weeds.

At sight of Counselor Weep she groaned aloud. Her escort said, with a grin:

"Now, Mrs. McSwigger, look at that party! Can you positively identify him as the one you saw yere this mornin'?"

"The very same vicious vilyan. I'd know him 'mongst a thousand," Mrs. McSwigger malevolently returned.

Counselor Weep had but opened his mouth to say, "By what authority——" when the man growled out:

"None er yer sass, my fine feller! D'jye ever hear of Antony Comstock's serciety?"

"I have; but what has that to do with this case?"

"You'll find out time enough. Now, come erlong with me peaceable, if yer want to be let off easy."

"If 'you want to be let off easy,' you had better leave here at once."

"Had, eh? What d'ye think o' that?" and the man pulled back his coat to show a concealed badge. "Maybe you b'lieve now I'm 'n officer."

"What is your charge? Who accuses me?"

"Oh, my, but ain't he innersunt! The baby jes' born is a hoary sinner 'side er him!" exclaimed the officer, apostrophizing space.

Mrs. McSwigger laughed sardonically, saying:

"Yes; of co'se! I didn't put on a yaller wig an' set on that very chair outside till I nigh about growed to it, peekin' and pryin'! Oh! I've knowed a many sech as he, but never none quite so shameless bold, an' ef he ain't roundly fetched up I'd as well throw up my place and go at something where I'll be believed."

"That might be hard to find, Swiggy," her companion said jocosely. "And I think you'll hang on to a place that means eight dollars a week, an' opportunities which it is human natur'—not to say female natur'—to embrace. We all does it. Jes' tell the gen'l'mun more pertickler what you know of how he embraced his'n."

Counselor Weep turned white with rage. "Out of my sight!" he thundered. "You scum! you scurf of the body politic!"

Mrs. McSwigger went on unmoved. "My eyes ain't gimlets——"

"But they come within one of it," her official friend interpolated in a facetious aside.

"I can't see through doors that are shet, but I can hear; and the way some o' them pore things that went inside cried and went on was sinful to Moses. An' one I did see a-kneelin' as if she was

about ter kiss that vilyan's boots; an' once I heard——"

"That will do," Counselor Weep said, shocked by the monstrous outrage into real dignity. "This is not a police court; though even there I think your story would scarcely be believed."

"That's jest where yer make yer mistake. Swiggy is a sort of star witness. She's got mighty good backers, I tell yer! Fine folks, who believe all she says," the moral policeman returned impartially. Then he added significantly, "It's amazin' how easy it is to make a case against—well, say a gen'l'mun. Must be folks like to believe the worst. If I was you now, I wouldn't let Swiggy have all night to remember—lots o' things that has slipped her memory and will come up by mornin'. You see primy fashy it looks—well, you know—fishy! so many young women comin' here where, as the world sees, there ain't nothin' to call 'em."

"H—m! I suppose a lawyer, then, may not advertise in the interest of a client as seems to him best in order that a particular person may be found?" Counselor Weep interrogated, with deep disdain.

The officer, grinning, asked:

"Can you produce that client?"

It was a shot betwixt wind and water. Counselor Weep turned red, then white; grew hot, then cold. What! Produce Lysander Bangs in court, and have every reporter seize upon the man's unique personality—use his sharpened wits in dragging to light the heart of their mystery? That would mean the unearthing of him, Endymion Weeper; the premature exploitation of his magnificent discovery; maybe, indeed, its bringing to naught through the most shameless piracy.

Outrageous, absurd, monstrous as it was, he must at all hazards stop this McSwigger's mouth and memory. Drawing her coadjutor a little apart, he spoke with him to such purpose that the officer said, as he thrust a clinched hand deep into his pocket:

"You'll find it all on the level, sir; make ye mind easy. Gen'l'mun that deals square never has no trouble when I'm around. As fer Swiggy here, she's a good creatur' but over-zealous; besides, we all know the female sect don't allers see straight."

Counselor Weep had hardly drawn the breath of ease when Muttons, the embodiment of limp protest, ushered in another stranger.

Evidently the last-comer was a man not used to being gainsaid, though there was about him no trace, of vulgar audacity. He was tall and spare, of fair build and good carriage, with a well-bred face, lit by keen, dark eyes and accented by a very resolute mouth. This man stopped just inside the door, half smiling, half pausing at sight of Mrs. McSwigger and her companion, both of whom seemed immensely discomfited by his appearance.

Indeed, they tried to scuttle past him without a word, but he held the door fast, saying: "Hello, Mole-eye! At your old tricks, eh?"

"Now, Mr. Patton," Mole-eye answered with a sickly grin, "we ain't no tricksters; you oughter know we ain't. Ef you came yere for the *Blazer*, sir, you won't find nothin'; everything's as straight as a string. We shouldn't 'a' been yere but for an honest misunderstandin', which the best o' us is liable to."

Mrs. McSwigger was for war. She folded her arms, raised her eyebrows, and sniffed defiantly; but at a warning word from her companion in pillage, dropped a deep courtesy, and whined:

"Mister Pat'n, the sight of you do me good. Well I know you newspaper gen'l'mun is the best

of friends pore lone widder women has got. Ef there wus more of ye this world'd be jest heaven to us."

"Hardly, I think," Patton said, flinging wide the door. "You had better go and give this gentleman and myself space to recover from your good opinion of us."

As they passed out he turned to Counselor Weep, who had heard the words "*Blazer*" and "newspaper gentleman" with some perturbation and displeasure, saying courteously:

"I fear, sir, I'm just in time to be too late. My name, as you have heard, is Patton; and, as you have also heard, I am connected with the *Blazer;* but notwithstanding I am not here to pry into your affairs. Business brought me this way, and one of my newsboy friends told me he yesterday overheard Mole-eye and the McSwigger plotting to 'secure something handsome' out of you. I know them of old, and so just ran in, hoping to save you from blackmail."

"Much obliged—really," Counselor Weep said, a trifle stiffly. "Are you sure that was all your business with me?"

Mr. Patton laughed as he replied: "On my honor, yes; but if there is anything—well, you

know the *Blazer* is always on the watch for a good story."

"Were you not sent here to—to find out—anything?"

"I generally speak the truth—to people who permit it. Is there anything to find out?" Patton asked, looking intently at his involuntary host.

That person responded irresolutely:

"Nothing."

Yet when Patton turned to leave, he held out a detaining hand. After all, the Counselor reflected, there was no muzzling the press, and he was not even sure it would be desirable. Had not the enormous value of advertising just been shown? Without it, even his great idea might be slow in fruiting; and what medium so fit as the *Blazer*, brightest and best of metropolitan journals! Besides, this opportune attaché of the paper had a trust-compelling face. It might be well to give Mr. Patton a hint of the truth, of course binding him to inviolate secrecy both as to the prime mover's identity and the work he had in hand. So Counselor Weep said nervously:

"Ah, Mr.—ah—Parrot—your face invites confidence. Come into my own apartment and you shall hear of something wonderful."

Eustace Patton with difficulty suppressed a whistle, but followed the other, saying to himself:

"Some, it seems, have secrets thrust upon them."

CHAPTER VII.

An hour later Counselor Weep and Mr. Patton, of the *Blazer*, came out of the former's private room, laughing and chatting, apparently on the best of terms with themselves and each other. How much or how little the Counselor had revealed there was no way of knowing; but from the amusement depicted on Eustace Patton's face it was evident he had heard something that greatly amused him.

As they reached the street door Muttons stepped before them, a positively human expression flickering over his usually wooden countenance.

"H'if you'd be pleased, sir," he said, "'ere's h'a young person as h'is h'a-waiting most pertickler ter see you. H'is she to come h'in?"

"Why, of course," Counselor Weep replied airily, looking over to Patton with what was dangerously near a wink. He was jubilant, for had he not made sure of the press? The thought made him as nearly jovial as the consciouness of being a Weeper allowed. Seating himself, he motioned

Patton to a place at his elbow, and leaned across to say:

"Gad! This day has upset that fellow of mine! Wouldn't surprise me to see him let in a coal-heaver, if one came. When you see this 'young person' you will perhaps understand part of what it means to have ideas and the courage to act upon them."

"No doubt," Patton said, with a half smile; then under his breath as the door opened: "Man alive! You have certainly had nothing like this before!"

The waning daylight fell softly upon a slender, flower-faced creature, not a day past nineteen. She was "more than common tall," but had absurdly small feet, and bare, slim hands. Her threadbare black gown was well cut and brushed, and the little black hat resting on her shining hair had no trace of tawdry ornament to vulgarize its honest cheapness. More than all, the grace of gentle blood redeemed her poor apparel.

A quick, wavering scarlet flush glowed in each slightly hollowed cheek; the velvety dark eyes had a pitifully strained look that was accented by the mouth's tense line and emphasized by the pitiful tremor in which she said:

"Please, sir, I am tall, with yellow hair, and my brother has gone away. Will these circumstances help me to hear anything to my advantage?"

"Why, I — yes — yes — certainly!" Counselor Weep said, rising and drawing forward a chair; but the girl tottered, staggered, and would have fallen had not Eustace Patton sprung and caught her in his arms. Very tenderly he laid the slight form upon the soft low couch, by which he knelt and felt for the flutter of life in her wrist. Looking at the girl, Counselor Weep somehow saw all things dim and blurred. He rang sharply, saying as Muttons appeared:

"Broth—wine! Quick! Do you hear?" Then in a low tone as the servant disappeared, "Good heavens, Patton, this means starvation!"

"And overstrain," Mr. Patton returned in the same key.

Almost as the words left his lips, the girl shivered faintly, opened her eyes, and tried to sit up.

"Lie still; you must," the young man said, gently forcing her back upon the pillow.

Muttons hurried in with a cup of steaming bouillon. "Drink this, every drop, before you try

to move or speak," the self-appointed nurse ordered, holding it to her lips.

Silently she obeyed, Eustace Patton looking on and smiling approval. Then Counselor Weep came forward to say:

"In ten minutes you must have some sherry and a biscuit, after which we will talk business to your heart's content."

The girl hid her face in the pillow, her pale lips quivering. After a minute she said in a low tone: "You are too kind, and make too much of a trifle; I have walked a good deal, and standing made me faint."

"Yes, we understand," Eustace Patton said soothingly.

Counselor Weep looked on with varying emotions, unable to decide whether he ought to be furiously jealous of or enormously grateful to this remarkably self-possessed young man, who was showing himself able to cope with a very delicate situation. But upon one point his mind was crystal clear, namely, that here was his ideal heroine made manifest in the flesh, and that he did not intend to lose sight of her, even if to compass his end it should become necessary to invent a legion of long-lost brothers.

In a few moments the girl sat up, raised her eyes to his, and said, unsteadily:

"Please, sir, let me go away unquestioned. Your—your kindness—makes me feel that I ought never to have come."

"Indeed! How can that be?" Counselor Weep asked, while Eustace Patton instinctively drew nearer the trembling creature who was trying to rise.

"Sit still," he said, "I entreat. We are both sure you did right in coming. Wait a little, then you shall tell your story."

"No! No!" the girl cried, shrinking back. "I —I am not—a beggar—and that would make me seem such. I—I did not come here on—on my own account, but treacherously, to spy out things, and make market of them. I—I—oh, how did I ever stoop to such a thing? It seems unutterably vile! Yet I am not wholly without excuse; I was desperate—too desperate to fully realize how contemptible it was."

"Why, what does this mean? Did you not reply to my advertisement?" Counselor Weep asked in a puzzled voice.

After a moment's silence the girl raised her head and said in a firmer voice:

"Maybe I would better tell you the whole story. I have lost my brother, though that had only a little share in bringing me here. My name is Cecil Ware; my birthplace, Maryland, where I lived with grandfather until two years ago. Besides us two there was only brother Calvert, ten years my senior, who lived in New York and gave us whatever we chose to ask or wish for, though he himself came home but rarely, and then only for little scraps of time.

"Calvert was in Wall Street, and said he could not leave business for more than three days. Two years ago we received a telegram that he was coming. He started—so much we know—and vanished—that is the only word! We have searched, hoped, prayed—grandfather and I—but—but so far fruitlessly; and the shadow of his taking away seems to have fallen on everything else."

"Did you come to the city in search of him?" Counselor Weep inquired.

Cecil shook her head, saying:

"No; to work. I live here with grandfather."

"And your Maryland estate?" Eustace Patton asked.

"It is sold."

"Ah, your grandfather perhaps is in business?"

"He is blind."

"But you have the money invested?"

Cecil's eyes blazed. She nervously locked and interlocked her fingers, then said coldly:

"If we had 'investments,' do you think I would be here?"

"Candidly I do not. But you have not yet stated why you came," Eustace Patton said, trying to look dispassionately at her beautiful, down-lidded eyes, and face exquisite in its flushings of shame.

A hotter red flamed into it, the quivering lips were almost beyond control, and she spoke so low her listeners bent to hear:

"That is hardest of all. I have done all sorts of honest work possible to one who has neither training nor special knowledge; and pay for such, as you know, is pitifully small. So at last I tried to write a bit—and really some small things were published. But lately everything has gone against me. To-day," swallowing a lump that rose in her throat, "I—I took something to the editor who had been kindest to me—something I had sat up nearly all night to finish. He just glanced at the pages, that was all; then handed it back. Maybe my eyes told him what the rejection meant, for

after speaking in a low tone to the man beside him he looked me over and said, 'O, Miss Ware, here's something that seems ready to your hand.' Then he showed me your advertisement, which he had answered himself, intending to send some one here. This editor knows about Calvert, and at last succeeded in persuading me to—to—come and —find out—what I could, promising, if my work was successful, regular employment. Had there been only myself, but you see I have grandfather to think of; besides, the hope would come, what if I should hear news of Calvert? Such strange things happen in cities, I am told. But now, now I feel that we would almost better have starved than that I should have come on such an errand."

"Indeed, you would not," Counselor Weep said emphatically. "What you call treachery I name special providence, and can never be grateful enough to that editor—even if he did intend doing me an ill turn."

"Why—why—do you say that?" Cecil cried, springing up, her eyes full of eager light. "Did you—do you know my brother? Oh, do tell me he is alive and well!"

Eustace Patton gave the Counselor a warning glance. That gentleman's invention rose nobly to

the occasion. With the most convincing and business-like air, he said:

"My dear young lady, I am sorry to be at present unable to give you direct tidings of your brother, but I shall make it my first concern to have news of him before long. Meantime, believe this: A friend, a man who was under a load of obligation to him, has died, leaving in my hands a sum of money for a tall girl with yellow hair whom he had once seen in your brother's company, but whose name and home he did not know. He did, however, suppose that you were a—relative—and very dear to his benefactor. I suppose it will be easy to prove your identity?"

"Indeed! I don't know," Cecil answered, somewhat bewildered. But Eustace Patton interrupted her to say:

"Miss Ware, accept the goods the gods provide. Allow me to report for you to the editor who sent you here, and also to see about some employment more to your taste. Now you must take a cab—we have one at the door—go home, rest, sleep, and make your mind easy, at least until you hear from us."

Left alone, the two men gazed earnestly at each other. Eustace Patton sighed, but the next min-

ute laughed, though not quite naturally, as he remarked, extending his hand to Counselor Weep:

"Jupiter! that was a hole to be in, but you came through it like a hero! I've always believed a gentleman's first duty was to tell the truth."

The Counselor returned the grip in kind, and said, smiling, "We will call it a legal fiction; but it would not have held water, not at all, with the person called Bascom."

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was surely an odd coincidence that Eustace Patton was engaged to dine the evening of the day on which he had met the century's greatest idea, with his intimate friends, the Daltons, whose home and home-life, he had often said, might make any man in love with love.

The dinner, with Mr. Patton the only guest, was not to be a ceremonial affair, and after it the three were to attend some theatre. On his way to the house Eustace assured himself things could not possibly have happened better. He was sure it was only necessary to speak with Mrs. Dalton of Cecil Ware to secure for her the warm woman friend of whom she was so greatly in need. The young woman must be permitted to take only enough from that odd fish, Weeper, to tide her over the present extremity. Other ways would be found of helping the girl to help herself until such time as he should dare ask that she trust herself and her future to his keeping.

For the youth had instantly fallen many fathoms deep in love, and was so honest he did not try to

conceal the fact even from his own consciousness, while not in the least understanding it, for he was notoriously unsusceptible.

At seven-and-twenty he could recall no more serious tenderness for a woman than the callow passion coincident with his first mustache. Even that attack did not go hard, perhaps for the reason that he had very early been saturated with poetry and high romance. The object of his youthful sentiment had been a widow with a son more than half his own age, to whose presence, perhaps, Eustace Patton was indebted for more than once escaping speech that might have been unpleasant to have recalled later.

The wonderful new feeling experienced for Cecil Ware had nothing in common with that for the widow. It was not alone Cecil's beauty. Rare as was that, it could not explain the thrill that went through and through him whenever he recalled the delicious fact that for one half-minute he had held the fair girl in his arms. Something hidden—something breathed forth like the fine aroma of an unfolding flower—had stolen into and possessed his soul. Henceforth, he felt, life had a new purpose and meaning—was set to subtle harmonies whereof Cecil Ware was the keynote.

He meant to take the Daltons just as fully into his confidence as occasion and their humor should indicate was best. It was, therefore, somewhat unpleasant to find them wildly merry, overrunning with laughter, and ready to indulge in unprovoked quips and satires that to him seemed utterly pointless. Though they were in the main a good-natured pair, readier to laugh than to cry over their own misfortunes, Eustace Patton had always before found them wonderfully sympathetic—responsive to his own mood, either grave or gay.

Presently, as they lingered over dessert, Mrs. Dalton suddenly exclaimed:

"Jack, dear, we must tell Mr. Patton. He's bohemian enough not to be shocked. Only, Mr. Patton, please don't judge us a pair of lunatics, and kindly remember that this escapade was entirely my doing. I insist upon that. Jack disapproved stoutly, but I overbore him."

"What have you been doing?" Eustace asked with uplifted eyebrows, as though he smelt social enormity in the air and was preparing to administer a lecture on morals.

At the young man's tone and expression Mrs. Dalton laughed anew, while her husband's eyes twinkled, as he said reflectively:

"W-e-l-l! something rather in your line; something indeed that you may use if you will promise not to give us away."

"I wonder if your experience is half as odd as one I came to relate," Eustace returned, thoughtfully, without looking up from the walnut he was peeling.

"Oh! have you a story too? Let's hear it at once; ours can wait," Mrs. Dalton cried, glancing at her husband, who leaned back, smiled complacently, and remarked slowly:

"I'm not a prophet, nor the son of one—but I have a very strong conviction that our stories will somehow dovetail into each other."

"Hardly," Eustace said. "Mine caps the climax of oddity."

"Why do you think Mr. Patton's story has any connection with ours?" Marion queried of her husband.

"Oh, because," replied Mr. Dalton, with a slight shrug, "you know it is part of my conceit to imagine that an excellent detective was lost when I embraced art. Patton has admitted being on the West Side this afternoon; he has also the air and manner of one oppressed with a new sensation, and in addition confesses of having a story to tell. Now we were on the West Side——"

"Not at 709 West — Street? Don't tell me that!" Eustace interrupted.

"Even so," said Marion, and added after a moment's pause, "as I see you must have been likewise. Do, do please tell us, is that man a lunatic, a crook of the first water, or just an ordinary superhuman idiot?"

"None of the three," Eustace said, "but an odd fish, whose oddity comes near the point of genius. Some day I will tell you what was back of that crazy advertisement—or rather there were two, though I presume you noticed but one. Who could have thought you would have been among those who answered it?"

"How I wish I could have seen all who applied and heard their conversation," Marion said, with sparkling eyes. "Really, now, can't you tell us what is under the cards? It must be a charming story, and we'll never, never tell."

Eustace shook his head. "The secret has been intrusted to my honor!" he replied. "Of course had I found it out you should know at once. But —but there is another chapter I very much want you to know, the most interesting one of all, at least to me."

"Oh! Who is she?" Jack Dalton asked with a

quizzical lift of the eyebrows. Eustace returned his glance undauntedly, though his face flushed, and he replied equably:

"That's just what I want to tell you. Her name is Cecil Ware! Is it not beautiful?"

"What?" the Daltons both exclaimed in the same breath. Then Mr. Dalton continued:

"You don't mean it! It can't be that Calvert Ware's sweet sister is in any way concerned?

"What do you know of her?" Patton demanded, even more astonished than his entertainers at this new turn of affairs.

"Everything—up to two years ago: since then —well, it's too long and strange a tale to summarize! Tell us how you encountered Cecil Ware. It seems as though we have all been playing a fine game of cross-purposes. Speak the whole truth, and as much more as your modesty will allow."

Thus adjured, Eustace Patton spoke freely, keeping back only Mr. Weeper's grand ulterior purpose, and his own. When the story had been finished, Jack Dalton arose, saying:

"Eustace, I think you won't mind a disappointment about the theatre this evening. Calvert Ware was my friend—even as you are; I wonder you have not heard me speak of him, though I

remember you came to the city some time after he disappeared. We were boys together, Calvert and I, down in Maryland. Marion has often played with your fairy princess, though she is some years her elder.

"We have few ties with the old home now; still we somehow heard that the Wares had left Wareham, sold their place, and gone no one knew where. But what you tell us of blindness and poverty is almost beyond belief. The plantation was large, and must have brought a good sum. No doubt the Major spent a great deal in the search. Calvert's disappearance was a nine days' wonder. But if those two have nothing—are forced to depend upon that child's exertions—there has surely been foul play, which I shall make it my business to find out.

"Meantime Marion and I must go at once to see them before they have a chance to slip away. The Major is pride itself, and if he can help it will not let any who knew him in better days find them now. But they will hardly look for callers tonight. Don't you think it best to go without delay?"

"Certainly! But you must take me; it is just what I intended asking Mrs. Dalton to do," Eustace replied eagerly.

Mr. Dalton looked at him quizzically, then said in a pretended aside to his wife:

"It's no use, Marion; poor Eustace has it very badly—so badly the only possible cure, and I have not much faith even in that, is to see and hear of the beloved object as often as possible."

Marion frowned. "That will never, never do, sir!" she said to Eustace. "You must not spoil this very romantic romance. Our friend, the lunatic, has evidently fallen in love with Cecil, and I demand a fair field for him."

"All is fair in love," Eustace Patton returned, nowise deceived by Mrs. Dalton's pretence of disapproval. "Be assured he has weighty advantage; so long a lead, indeed, that an ordinary rival would give up the fight."

"H—m; I must say modern journalism does not tend to develop an abnormal modesty in its followers," asserted Mr. Dalton with an air of impartial speculation.

Marion at once went over to Eustace's side. "Never mind Jack," she said; "so high-toned an individual deserves to be left at home. But come, both of you; remember we are bound for the wilds of Harlem, and if we stand chattering here all night shall not get there before morning."

CHAPTER IX.

It was in a poor, bare place—a tiny apartment very far over to the west—that Marion Dalton found her friend, whom she kissed and cried over to her heart's content. The gentlemen, it had been decided, would better wait outside until it was known how the Wares were situated.

Cecil herself answered Marion's knock, and half shrank at sight of her, though there was overrunning gladness in the girl's eyes. Marion understood Cecil's shrinking, as she had also understood why the Wares had not made known to her their presence in the city. They had felt the obligation of nobility, first to help themselves before claiming an acquaintance that in itself must mean help.

When, finally, words came, Marion held Cecil at arm's length, and looking her steadily in the eyes, said:

"Where is Major Ware?"

"In there—asleep, thank God!" Cecil answered, nodding toward a larger inner room; then, half choking, she continued: "Marion, I—I—feel al-

most like his murderer! I ought to—to have come to you—you would have helped us—but—but—it did not occur to me until to-night that hunger had made him so wakeful. We have lived, oh, so sparely! And he has never complained, but every night I have heard him toss and moan—and once, last night, after he dropped asleep toward three o'clock, I crept in to look at him, and he was sobbing as a baby might. That made me desperate! I saw how pinched and wasted his dear face was; I told myself something must happen to-day, and —well, it did!

"We had only a few dollars, but I gave my dear a good dinner and told him it was but the first of many—that our hard days were over. He did not even ask me why, but soon began to doze and drowse, so I begged him to leave me, and then sat down to think over what would better be done. I had just decided to see you the first thing to-morrow. Maybe it was my need of you that brought you to-night? Tell me how you found us out?"

"Life is a curious network," Marion replied. "Oddly enough to-day's happenings touch me almost as nearly as they do you. You see, I know your adventure, and can almost match it with one of my own. But the very strangest part is that a

man—a special friend of ours—met you at 709 West — Street and brought us word."

"Oh! You mean Mr. Patton! I—I—hope he will not tell—every one," Cecil said, with a quick blush, her eyes full of trouble.

"Be very sure he will not," Marion said emphatically. "I know no man—not even my husband—who is to be more thoroughly relied upon for delicate discretion. Mr. Patton would never have said a word had not he wished to secure for you a woman friend, not knowing you had one, but were too proud to claim her."

"Did—did you come alone?" Cecil asked, looking keenly at her friend. Marion shook her head, saying:

"Indeed I did not. Jack and Mr. Patton are waiting outside. May I ask them to come up? There are some things you ought to know, and some I hope you can help us find out."

Cecil glanced at the bare floor, wooden chairs, pine table, with its litter of pens and paper; hard, cheap lounge, that served as her bed; curtainless windows, and smoky walls; then at her friend, and said, with filling eyes:

"If—if you think I ought to see them, I will—even here."

Half an hour later she had forgotten her surroundings in the absorbing interest of what had been told her. For now that there was another way of saving her from bitter poverty, Eustace Patton decided she should not become Mr. Weeper's beneficiary. The Daltons quite agreed with him; they would take care of present needs, and the three together start in train such affairs as would insure Cecil's earning a comfortable living.

Meantime something must be done regarding Calvert, and the property which it was morally certain he had left. There was the sale of Wareham, too. Jack Dalton had heard it fetched a fair price. What had become of the money was a mystery. No doubt Major Ware had been cheated out of it; had perhaps intrusted it to some specious scoundrel who, under a fiction of investment, had made away with it.

A blind old man, the soul of delicate honor, would no doubt seem temptingly safe game—all the more when connected with him there was only a young girl wholly unversed in the ways and wiles of business. So the two men reasoned. Acting upon their theories was, however, not so easy. Cecil looked at them with large-eyed, restful faith

when they spoke cautiously of Mr. Weeper and his trust, and said, with a tremulous smile:

"Dear, good man! I shall always remember him as my special providence! You cannot know, I hope you never may, what it is to have just five dollars between yourself and starvation. Now that we are to have, maybe, a whole thousand, I can let myself tremble over it; before, I dared not. Best of all, it gives me back my friends. I am genuinely glad to see you—but—but if you had come—if I had met you even while such a pauper, I think I must have run away—or died of shame."

The two men exchanged significant glances. Marion read their import, and said, by way of changing the conversation:

"We will hope, Cicely, that he is Monte Cristo in disguise. But Jack and Mr. Patton want to ask you about your brother and some other matters. Can you bear to have them do so to-night?"

"Try me and see," Cecil answered, her whole face eagerly aglow.

"Then," said Eustace Patton, "tell me as nearly as you can exactly what happened during the month after your brother's disappearance."

"Only one thing that I remember—except the telegrams and waiting," Cecil said, with drooping

eyes; "that was grandfather's coming to New York. It was, I think, in the third week; I know we were wild with anxiety. I begged to accompany him, but it was useless.

"He went away looking ill and worn, but returned with what seemed a face of death! For three days he shut himself in his room, seeing no one except old Ephraim, his black body-servant. When he came out his eyes were dim: it was the beginning of his blindness.

"All he said to me was: 'There is little hope, Cicely. We will go to the city to live. You would better make preparations at once; take only your clothes; we will not have room for other things.'

"When I asked if we were never to return, he bowed his head on his hands and said, 'No, never; I shall sell the place as it stands.' Then, as I did not speak, he said very slowly: 'I think, Cicely, you love the land. I—I—wish it might be different; it has belonged to a Ware ever since Lord Baltimore's time. If Calvert had but been content!' then he broke down, and never spoke of it again.

"We came here before the week was out, bringing almost nothing with us. . Grandfather had a place with some old friends in a large house down-

town. For six months we lived on in a sort of monotonous comfort; then one morning he awoke blind, and since then I have had to look after matters."

"Was Wareham sold before or after your grandfather became blind?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Before. In three months after we left it," Cecil replied with tremulous lips. "I know what you mean to ask," she continued, "what became of the money it brought? That is just what I do not know—what I have never had the heart to ask grandfather. What I do know is that it is gone. All we had when blindness came was the little he had been able to save from his salary.

"Imagine grandfather at his age working for a weekly wage and counting even the pennies—he who had been so free-handed all his life! Whatever was done with the money realized for Wareham, I am sure it was what he thought right and honorable. Some day maybe he will tell me; unless he does, I shall never know."

"Cicely," Mr. Dalton said, "that is all very well. We honor your loyalty to what may be a mistake. But, dear child, is it possible that nothing was ever done about Calvert's affairs? He was rich! Every one thought so! His partner

Wales is to-day one of the magnates of Wall Street. He must have known you were in the city. Has he never——"

"I have seen Mr. Wales. I—I do not like him —he came once—with Calvert—home—and—and I hated him!" Cecil said, flushing deeply. "I—I —hope he knows nothing about us, though sometimes I fear that—that he does."

"Indeed! Why?" asked Marion. Eustace Patton frowned savagely. Cecil lifted her head a little proudly, saying:

"If you please, I would rather say nothing more about him. But this I may tell you. Grandfather once said to me when I came half-frozen into a fireless room, 'My dear girl, you might have been saved all this if it were not in the Ware blood to think any discomfort preferable to dishonesty.'"

"Will you excuse a seemingly brutal but necessary question?" Eustace Patton asked, not raising his eyes.

Cecil closed her lips firmly, then replied:

"Yes, but I may not answer it."

"Silence will answer it," Eustace said gently. "It is this. Did not—does not Mr. Wales wish to marry you?"

Cecil looked appealingly at Mrs. Dalton, who said gently:

"You had better tell him, dear. These two—my husband and Eustace—have laid their heads together, determined to reach the heart of this mystery——"

"I know—know you mean only to be kind," Cecil interrupted. "I hate to confess it, but that man did—speak—in just a day after he first saw me."

"What did you do about it?" asked Mr. Dalton, his eyes twinkling.

"Ran away without a word," Cecil said promptly. "Ah, the bare memory of him makes me shudder!"

"You did not tell your brother?" Eustace questioned.

"No—that man was his guest—it would have been wrong. But I intended to tell him next time he came home, and beg him to be quit of such a shifting-eyed creature."

"And your brother never came," Eustace said softly. They had risen to take their leave, and her hand lay in his. He did not even press it, but as the door closed said to Jack Dalton: "No—her brother did not come—and I think I know why."

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mr. Endymion Weeper awoke on the morning succeeding his quest of a proper heroine, it was with somewhat the sensation one experiences when coming out of a queer dream. Lying in his own luxurious chamber, whose walls, floor, and indeed all the appurtenances thereof bespoke wealth, the recollection of that odd, expectant, yellow-haired procession filing in and out of the old-fashioned room seemed more than visionary. But as memory segregated it into individual units, Mr. Weeper's heart gave twice distinctly a quicker pulsation.

Cecil had impressed him as no other woman ever had; certainly he would not let her out of his sight, or fail in fulfilment of what she had been led to expect: still, the newer attraction did not wean him from his purpose, or make him forget that at twelve o'clock that day he was to call for a farther conference with Mrs. Antonia Devoe Bascom.

Somehow even in thought her full name clung to

her. Scanted of a syllable it would have failed to express the woman's marked individuality. Mr. Weeper, instead of scanting it, repeated it over and over with a relish that was unfeigned. She gave him in large measure the collector's delight in an unusually taking specimen; a delight which was sharply alloyed by the knowledge that he could not go to her as himself, could not see how she would be affected by the presence of a Weeper.

The regret might have been yet more poignant if by any chance he could have secured receipt of fern-seed and walked invisible into the lady's presence some ten minutes before the hour appointed for his call. If she had been charming in a street gown, Mrs. Antonia Devoe Bascom was more than fascinating in silk attire, that shimmered about her small shape with an effect of moonlit waves. She looked marvellously out of place in the dingy boarding-house parlor, so much so indeed as quite to justify her remarks to a rather faded person who sat at the room's farther end.

"I know it's a risk, but," with a shrug, "what am I to do? Realistic writing is the only sort I can bring myself to undertake. Do you think," with a glance about the apartment that might have scorched it to greater dinginess, "I can go on liv-

ing here? No! I was born for better things! I must write something startling! Not sensational —I should die if any one characterized my work as that! But something which will make the world talk—make people turn and look when I pass. This man may be all that's disreputable—but he's worth studying. I don't think he's a crook; at first I did, but after we had talked a while I felt convinced he was somebody: there is really an air of breeding about the man. Any way, I mean to see what will come of my adventure. If he really has any money for me from my poor uncle, it will be the veriest godsend."

"What will you do with it?" her listener asked.

"That depends! If it is only a little, I think I'll spend it on a trip to Europe—say for six months; that is, of course, unless"—checking herself and looking a trifle conscious as the other laughed.

"Unless Counselor Weep should prove to be worth captivating?" the other woman supplied.

"You say so, not I," Mrs. Bascom rejoined, "though really he is not bad looking. I must draw him out. Dear me! I hope none of the other people here will come blundering in during the counselor's call. One never has a bit of privacy in this parlor."

"I suppose that is a hint for me to go away. Thank you—I'm too comfortable. Besides, as you've told me about your adventure, I'm naturally a little curious to see the man," the lady said, sinking back in her rocker with an aggravating air of fixity.

Mrs. Bascom laughed, not quite amiably, saying: "Oh, you don't count! Besides, you won't hear anything if you stay where you are, and no one in the house believes a word you say."

"Don't they? How fortunate—for some people!" the other murmured, as the dun-colored portières parted and Mr. Weeper stood before them.

He had come without trepidation, the supereminent respectability of the address Mrs. Bascom had given him wholly relieving him from any fear of entanglement. He knew it nebulously as a perennial boarding-house, kept by a succession of spinsters with small, sharp noses and corkscrew curls. As a small boy Counselor Weep had called there several times with his Aunt Priscilla, who once had several good friends among those who made it their home. Thus he had learned that it was much affected by people from out of town, especially lone women who soon came to know

that the address was in itself almost equal to a chaperon.

However, that was not the reason why Mrs. Bascom had selected it as a place of residence. She came from the breezy West, where chaperonage is an undiscovered quantity. Besides, as a spotless divorcée, she felt the very sufficient protection of her wrongs, so had been not a little disconcerted by the discovery that a young and pretty woman could not go where she listed, accompanied only by a male companion, without effectually closing upon herself the doors of exclusive society.

At first she rebelled at the decree, but a little later went violently over to the enemy. Mrs. Bascom was ambitious in more ways than one, and for the sake of a career had endured many things. In her heart of hearts she was glad not to be alone, though she would have suffered torture rather than ask the other woman to be present.

"He will take her for my companion," she thought, rising to greet Mr. Weeper, who bowed deferentially over her hand, and as soon as they were established out of earshot of the "companion" said, in his most impressive manner:

"Mrs. Bascom, I am happy to say farther doubt is impossible. I have seen this returned miner,

and the description of your uncle tallies exactly with that of the man who left the—a—the legacy; though, for reasons of his own, no doubt, he was known to his mates as 'Hairy Smith.'"

"Poor Uncle Antony! I remember what a big beard he had," Mrs. Bascom said, with what was meant for reminiscent tenderness; then, brightening visibly: "Why didn't you bring the man—the diamond-miner—with you? I should so like to ask him all about—my uncle and everything."

Mr. Weeper smiled indulgently. "Well! He is hardly a suitable ornament for this—very respectable parlor," he said, glancing about him.

Mrs. Bascom made a grimace, and said, almost fiercely:

"I hate it! Oh! how I hate it! The 'respectability,' the ugliness of it, the whole commonplace atmosphere about me! No matter what the man is he would be a welcome relief."

"You shall see him, never fear," Mr. Weeper said, smiling more than ever at her outburst. "But trust me to choose time and place: that will make it ever so much more picturesque."

"I don't like to wait for anything!" Mrs. Bascom exclaimed, with a pout that was more than becoming.

"Not even for—good fortune? Poor little lady! I do not blame you. Depend upon it, you shall wait only so long as time and tide demand," the gentleman said, almost tenderly.

Mrs. Bascom's quick ear caught the inflection. Her eyes dropped—but were raised the next second in a glance of limpid, child-like inquiry as she asked, with a pretty timidity:

"What is your plan? Please tell me exactly."

Counselor Weep told her—at great length and with greater exactness. She heard him through without interruption, then said abruptly:

"If you really wish me to go with you, that man, and a lot of strange sailors, you must secure a chaperon for the party—one whose position is unimpeachable."

"Of course—your companion"—Mr. Weeper murmured tentatively, with a side glance at the flaccid figure at the room's farther end.

"Is—just no one at all!" Mrs. Bascom said decisively. "Besides, I don't want her! I have just told her no one ever believes a word she says; then, too, she's only an old maid."

"Ah!" said Mr. Weeper, a trifle aghast. "In that case won't you please to——"

"No," broke in Mrs. Bascom, shaking her head.

"I know but few people—none whom I would feel like taking into my confidence on such an occasion. As you are a resident it must be easy for you to secure some one whose social position will make the expedition perfectly proper."

"You will not go without?"

"I cannot! My friends assure me it would be ruinous to disregard the social law."

"May I ask if—if you expect to make New York your home?"

"Perhaps."

"What are your plans?"

"As yet they are indefinite. I have only just enough to live on—to starve on, rather. If—if Uncle Antony has really left me an appreciable addition to my fortune I think—I shall try literary work."

"What?" Mr. Weeper sprang to his feet. He stood bolt upright, his face one note of interrogation. Mrs. Bascom smiled demurely.

"I ought not to have told you that," she said. "I see you don't like literary women; but really they are not dreadful. I don't mean myself. I have seen several since I came here, and if you hadn't known, I am sure you would never have suspected they had any brains at all."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. WEEPER looked at her narrowly, smiled in a slightly bewildered fashion, then asked:

"Is this merely an intention? Have you done—that is—are you not already launched on the sea of letters?"

Mrs. Bascom smiled and dropped her eyes more demurely than ever as she admitted:

"Well, I've written some little things, society verses, you know, that editors seem to like; at any rate they ask for more."

Instant and enormous respect arose in Mr. Weeper's mind for this heroine who had tamed the editorial lions before whom he quailed. He said sympathetically, his eye the while busy with the curve of her long lashes:

"How is it that your continuing is a question of money? With such encouragement it seems to me you should not dream of doing anything else."

"Because," Mrs. Bascom replied, assuming a more erect posture, "I can't write as I would like without experience, and to obtain that one must have money."

Mr. Weeper changed color, but rallied sufficiently to say:

"It seems to me your own life supplies——"

"Oh, yes; all the situations of that sort I shall ever need! I have it all written—the trial, my feelings on learning I could be free, and the sensations that lie in freedom actually recovered," Mrs. Bascom interrupted. "Then, too, other men besides my husband have given me plenty of that sort of thing. But it is not what I want—only incidentally. What I would like is to find out odd, queer or grewsome people, and write them as they are, just as Howells does, you know."

Mr. Weeper shivered slightly. She was a most engaging sight, her eyes limpid, her face changing at each word. But he had a fine ear, one that delighted in soft cadence and perfect accent, and Mrs. Bascom, after the Western fashion, had spoken the name of her literary exemplar as though it were written "Howls."

As he was silent, she continued:

"I wouldn't write a story just for the story for anything, and therefore hesitate about making literature my life-work until confident I can afford to take my time and write just as pleases me, without regard to what pleases the public. If I must

be mediocre, it shall be in Greek and Latin, which I know well enough to teach. Indeed, I have a position now under consideration."

"But — you prefer literature?" Mr. Weeper asked.

"Very much prefer it—on the conditions just named. That is why I came to this city. I might have gone immediately into a college-chair in the West. I thought here there might be opportunity——"

"Pardon me," Mr. Weeper interrupted. There is something I would very much like to ask—did you come to me in full faith—in search of fortune —or with—with an ulterior object?"

Mrs. Bascom gave a long, sidewise glance, as she said:

"Dear me! What a question! I think it ought to be quite sufficient for you that I came at all."

* * * * * * *

"She is the most delicious bitter! Quite like absinthe *frappé*," Mr. Weeper said, three hours later, to Eustace Patton, in concluding the account of his call upon the fair divorcée.

The two had met by appointment in Mr. Weeper's own apartment, for having admitted Patton to the secret of his identity, the future

great novelist felt it would be well to impress him properly with the gravity, the grandeur of the matter in hand.

Eustace was impressed, though not in the fashion his host contemplated. Though the young fellow had never known poverty, his almost two years of city life had given him a sort of passionate eagerness for the success which can be minted as coin of the commonwealth.

Seated in Mr. Weeper's room, where on every side he saw the sign-manual of limitless affluence, he asked himself how it happened that the possessor of it all, overlooking or passing by grander, nobler opportunities, was driven to occupy himself with a conceit so bizarre as that now in hand. It must be that great riches robbed life of sap and savor, or, at the very least, of the wholesome salt of endeavor, the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Certainly life held other things better worth a man's striving. Of that he had been persuaded ever since Cecil's bright head had fallen upon his shoulder. Part of his purpose now was to speak frankly of her to this rich man, and arrange with him that the money which seemed to the young girl manna in the desert should really come out of

her friends' pockets. But on that point Mr. Weeper was adamant.

"No," he said, good-humoredly. "While I am more than glad for the young lady's sake that things are as they are—that her friends have found her out in this most peculiar way—it does not abate by one jot my promise, my claim to provide for her in this fashion which will not hurt her pride.

"I mean to be entirely fair. The Bascom shall have five thousand dollars in diamonds, and this sweet creature a like sum in whatever currency she pleases. Protest is useless, dear boy. You can't hinder, though you may help me vastly in this delicate matter. It won't do to trust ordinary men of business! Show yourself a good fellow, quit looking glum, and help me devise the very best way in which to help Miss Ware. Really, you know, there is no earthly reason why you should object."

"I think there is," Eustace said quietly. "I did not intend to speak quite so prematurely, Mr. Weeper, but I mean to marry Cecil Ware, if by any means it can be brought to pass. As a gentleman you must realize the impossibility of my becoming a party to any arrangement which will allow her, even unknowingly, to be under a finan-

cial obligation of such magnitude to another man—especially one who is rich, young, and single."

Mr. Weeper looked at him with a smile, half-sheepish, half humorous. "Very good of you to mention it, I'm sure," he murmured; "but, Patton, dear boy, I'm sorry—on my soul I am—but what you speak of is—impossible! I propose to marry Miss Ware myself!"

"You?" That one word was all Eustace could utter, and Mr. Weeper continued:

"Yes, I. You see it's this way; I felt as soon as I saw her that she was the one woman in all the world for me. I did really now; you need not laugh, but men in my position must have some regard to—well—you know, family, and antecedents, and all that. Of course I never questioned her fitness for—any position; no one who had once looked in her eyes could do so; but coming in so unusual a way, you understand—one doesn't expect to find a wife when he has only advertised for a—an ideal.

"I'm more than grateful to you for the news you have brought me. Of course I should soon have found out about her for myself, but your recital simplifies matters vastly; besides, I do not

overlook the advantage of having you to vouch for me. She's as simple and unsuspecting as a child, but I fancy when one came to touch on personal matters, lightning might strike him if he did not go about it in just the proper way."

"I think it would," Eustace said, not raising his eyes. He was dazed, confounded, by this new turn of what had before seemed to him an exceedingly pretty comedy. Now, however, it wore very much the aspect of tragedy. He had seen that Mr. Weeper was strongly impressed by Cecil, but that he should thus declare himself her serious suitor was quite beyond comprehension.

That the man was a rival by no means to be despised Patton could not for one second call in question. He could give Cecil so much—all that her generous heart, her rich nature craved. And he was himself far from ill-looking. Placing aside all consideration of wealth, nine women in ten would regard him as a desirable appanage matrimonial. Then, too, he had all the leisure upon which luck is said to wait.

Patton must make love, if at all, in shreds and patches of time stolen from work or sleep. It was giving long odds to pit himself against one who could spend days and nights writing ballads to his

mistress' eyebrows, or indulge unlimited in other craft of love.

All the same, Mr. Eustace Patton had no thought but to make the running, and if possible come in winner. Fortune, it is well known, is fickle. Having given Mr. Weeper so much, this changeful dame might reasonably now be expected to do him an ill turn. Besides, Eustace had plenty of grit; the harder a thing was to accomplish the more pleasure he found in doing it. He arose and walked thrice around the magnificent room, then stopped in front of its master, and said:

"I won't deny, sir, that so far as right goes one has as much as the other; that is, just none at all. It is, I confess, a bit of a facer to find you my rival; but some way, I hope you'll think better of it. You really ought. You're playing, remember, at a tremendous advantage with that charming grass widow up your sleeve. I've not the least doubt she suits you worlds better than—than the other—and that you'll find it out before long."

Mr. Weeper positively chuckled. "Dear boy," he said, "you may have the grass widow and welcome; that is, supposing you can win her. She has lost her relish for young men, even as material, or at least says so."

"Thanks, no! Do you believe her?" Eustace demanded.

Again Mr. Weeper chuckled. "In strict confidence I do not; that is, remembering parts of our interview. But don't indulge a hope that she may distract my affections, dear boy. Remember the proverb about two of a trade. If I respect her frankness a little, I also fear it. Think of making one in a procession of husbands, all of whom serve either to point an immoral or adorn a tale."

In spite of his perturbation Eustace laughed, then said, shaking his head:

"I have hope of her, notwithstanding. A man neither loses nor acquires a taste for absinthe *frappé* in a day. He is much more likely to weary of thinking about a simple, pretty girl, who aspires to be nothing more."

"Don't speak for her until you can do it 'by the card,'" Mr. Weeper said slowly, rising. "At least, wait until we know something about her plans. Come and present me in due form. I'm really sorry to stand in your light, dear boy, but depend upon it you shall have a fair field."

"Yes, nothing less will save you some broken bones," Eustace said to his inner consciousness, as he followed Mr. Weeper to the waiting coupé.

CHAPTER XII.

"FIVE thousand dollars! Oh, I never can believe we again have so much money! Why, it is better than a fairy tale!" Cecil exclaimed to Eustace Patton after the hubbub of questions and replies had a little subsided, and her grandfather, as well as herself, was convinced that the money was rightfully theirs. Convincing them might not have been so easy, but Eustace Patton, vouched for by the Daltons, was a sufficient surety for Mr. Weeper and his intentions.

It was quickly apparent to Eustace that all the Wares needed was a certainty that the money did not come from Mr. Wales. Had it, he was persuaded they would starve rather than touch a penny. It was not at all pleasant to him, this making plain Mr. Weeper's path; indeed, it cut him to the quick in any manner to deceive those who relied upon his word. But a look about the rooms was enough to quiet even stronger scruples. Almost anything rather than let those two gently bred creatures, used to sunlight, sweet air, and

the luxury of privacy, remain in that squalid place. Assuredly they needed present help, and this was the most available; their delicate pride made direct assistance impossible. Looking into her radiant face, Eustace asked in a low tone:

"What are you going to do with it? You will, of course, leave this place."

Cecil nodded emphatic assent, saying, with a mysterious smile:

"Guess, please! I thought it all out when a thousand was the limit of hope. Oh, it's a beautiful plan!"

"I am not a seer," Eustace said, smiling. "Heaven forfend that I should try to penetrate the mysteries of a young lady's mind. But if you will forgive the presumption, I would like to suggest a plan, temporary at least. Next year may bring startling changes to—all of us."

"What is it! Tell me by all means," Cecil said. "Of course I want all the wise counsel possible."

"So you can follow your own plans with a clear conscience? That is why people generally ask advice," Eustace said, reluctant to let their confidences cease, as it kept her for the time being wholly apart from Mr. Weeper.

Cecil half turned from him, saying, with a pretence of frowning:

"I am not 'people generally!' When you are ready to tell me I will listen."

"You are very impatient," Eustace replied. "I see you will not have the wisdom of experience at second hand. Now be pleased to hear that it seems to me you would better take a pretty, cheerful apartment, much farther down town, make yourself comfortable, hire a good servant, and then see what you can do in the way of writing. The main thing, I assure you, is to learn the hows and wherefores, and in a little while you may be earning a good income."

"The prospect is delightful!" returned Cecil, "but I must not let myself be tempted. Perhaps I might write and even be paid for a lot of poor stuff—I see plenty that I know costs money. But it is such a dreadful, dreadful grind! I hate it! Worse, I hate myself for doing it. I am not intellectual, like your New York girls, but I was brought up on the classics, and reverence—yes, actually reverence—good English. I don't want to be one of those who live by doing it violence."

"Such scruples certainly do you honor," Eustace said, laughing. "All the more that you are now a

young person of fortune. But if you will not continue writing, how, may I ask, do you propose to employ yourself?"

"Listen! It's a great secret! But my mind is fully made up! I shall raise chickens—spring chickens, you know—for the New York market," Cecil said, her head turned slightly aside, and the blue eyes dancing.

Before Eustace could reply she continued: "I want to find a place—the very sandiest one—somewhere in Jersey, say an hour's run from the city. Then I'll send for Mammy Susan and Uncle Ephraim whom we left in Maryland, buy a lot of hens and brooders, and incubators, and all the rest. You see part of my literary (?) work was for a poultry journal. I read all about such things in that, and ever since have lain awake nights cudgeling my poor brains as to how I could possibly start the business."

"H-m-m!" said Mr. Weeper, who had given her plan an interested ear. "My dear Miss Ware, I fear you will find that a very laborious and—and unpleasant undertaking. It is not, of course, my province to say anything regarding the disposition you make of your inheritance, but if I might venture a suggestion, it would be that you establish

yourself in comfort here in the city and await developments. I agree with Mr. Patton that the next few months are likely to be full of important changes for you."

"If—if—there was a hope of Calvert's coming back," Cecil said wistfully.

Her grandfather suddenly stood upright, though there was a pitiful tremor in the hand he extended, as he said:

"There is no hope, Cicely; none whatever. Calvert is dead—dead, do you hear? Else we would certainly have seen him. Indeed, I wonder sometimes how even death itself can keep him away."

"Pardon the question, sir," Eustace said, as the old man sank, nerveless and trembling, back into his seat, "but did you ever communicate directly with Mr. Wales after your grandson's disappearance?"

"Once," Major Ware said laconically; then with sudden heat, "once too often! Wales is a scoundrel!"

"H-m! Was he satisfied to let communication cease?" Eustace asked.

"Perhaps not. I made him understand though that the course was imperative," Major Ware said, the veins on his forehead swelling.

Cecil held up a warning hand, and said as she dropped on the stool at his feet:

"Never mind, grandpappy—tell me—tell our friends, how you like my plan?"

"You must choose for yourself. You are eyes, feet, hands, head, all," the old man said, laying a hand on her bright hair. "But I think you would better take counsel with the Daltons. They understand—everything, and will surely help you do the best."

"Not a doubt of it," Eustace said eagerly. "I was just about to say that if your heart is set on this scheme the Daltons could and would help you tremendously. They own just such a place as you want, spend most of the summer there, and will no doubt be overjoyed to have you for a tenant the year round. It's a big, rambling old house on about the wildest, most picturesque bit of coast between here and the Capes, and is amply large for both families. I spent several Sundays with them last year, and remember what a lot of unoccupied rooms there were."

Cecil clapped her hands, saying, "That is just the thing! An establishment ready to my hand and a chance to pay part of the rent in broilers! Mr. Patton, you don't look in the least like a ma-

gician, but are you sure you have not conjured the place up for our especial benefit?"

"Miss Ware suspects you of the newspaper imagination, Patton," Mr. Weeper said, smiling at Cecil in a delightfully human way.

She met his glance without sign of shrinking or aversion. In truth there was nothing at all repellant in the face on which her eyes rested. Mr. Weeper was developing in most unexpected fashion. The intimate knowledge of his kind, their straits, sufferings and even vagaries, had pierced the callous of uninterrupted prosperity in which his soul had hitherto been encased, and made him very much like other men.

Then, too, there was Cecil herself to be taken into account. Though he had not lost his head over her, he was distinctly and consciously many fathoms deep in love with her. At all points she satisfied, suited him; the thought or sight of her gave him a thrill second only to that which overwhelmed him at the memory of his great enterprise.

"Confound the fellow! He is not a bit grotesque now, but has improved disgustingly!" Eustace Patton said to himself as he watched the pair.

Cecil had returned Mr. Weeper's smile with one divinely sweet. Now she stood facing him, speaking low and eagerly, too low for even a jealous lover's ear to catch the words. Certainly she had more than toleration for the strange lawyer who had brought her such good fortune.

Mr. Weeper had chosen to go to her under his own name, but had prevailed upon Eustace not to mention his circumstances. Weepers he knew were not plenty, but Cecil was too ignorant of the city and its ways to be aware of that. If by and by she should come to know him for what he really was, all the better: meantime he would make no offensive parade of the wealth and consequence that she must certainly be wise enough not to undervalue.

"Raise chickens! The idea! That rose of womanhood!" Mr. Weeper said as the two lovers departed. "Why, there's been nothing like it since the days of the Little Trianon, where a queen and her court played at being dairymaids!"

Eustace bent upon his comrade a questioning look, but made no reply. Mr. Weeper laughed airily, saying:

"'Pon my soul, Patton, you're jealous as a bear! Better give up, dear boy, while yet there is time.

Consider that she really deserves me, and console yourself with the next pretty girl."

"I will when Miss Ware refuses me, but not a day before," Eustace replied, with a laugh whose merriment was not quite sincere.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL sorts and conditions of men go sometimes to Dash's concert garden. Only those women, though, who have escorts, more or less reputable looking, are admitted to its privileges, which, together with the charge of ten cents at the door, perhaps justifies its proprietor in styling it a "Select Family Resort."

It is a barn-like place, big and low, with a sliding glass roof, and sanded floor where bare, round tables and cane-seated chairs are closely grouped. At one end is a stage, and opposite that, beyond some glass doors that are forever on the swing, are the restaurant and bar, through which for the most part the swell patrons enter.

Swelldom, as here understood, is a comparative state. It has little to do with outer and visible things, but is written in the liquids ordered as soon as you are comfortably seated. Beer or sarsaparilla marks you simply one of the herd. To drink lemonade in such company is an open shame, unless the drinker be feminine and understood to be playing it "finnikin."

Whiskey sours are respectable; cocktails, vermouth, Manhattan and their like, give a certain mild flavor of distinction, which in the case of sherry and bitters becomes a trifle more pronounced. But to him who orders a "bottle," large or small, the whole establishment does homage. Indeed he is only outranked in their esteem by the generously thirsty soul who comes in with a party, and beginning on beer runs the whole liquid gamut in the course of the evening.

To such an one nothing is forbidden. The sleepiest bartender will mix for him unmurmuring a round of John Collinses at two o'clock in the morning. Other waiters look enviously at the one privileged to attend him, and the most irate bouncer merely smiles if such a patron insists upon mounting the table to sing "The Bowery" in opposition to the world-renowned serio-comic Schnoozleglass' best number.

Such truly golden moments are rare—at Dash's. The proprietor often sighs and shakes his head as he recounts what he loses by insistence on strict morality. At Claws', around the corner, everything—especially everything in petticoats—goes, and it is not uncommon for the place to have three champagne buyers in one and the same evening.

In spite, though, of his sacrifices, Dash looks very prosperous—a round, rosy citizen, always smiling save when he is forced to reflect upon the fearful price he pays for keeping a strictly family resort.

There was excellent reason for his smiles upon an evening some days later than the one which had brought Lysander Bangs to Mr. Weeper's knowledge. Though barely ten o'clock—quite too early for after-theatre comers—every chair was occupied, the waiters were all on the dead run, and, of course, money was pouring in a tinkling silver flood into Dash's coffers.

Dash softly rubbed his fat hands and raised grateful eyes to the glass roof, through which now and then a star blinked enviously at the flaring electric lights. Last evening, with somewhat of hesitancy, he had put on a new performer—a dancer who had only said:

"Gimme a show for my—well, my slippers, Popper Dash. I don't want to be an angel, but I'll make such a fairy that every man will have to drink me health."

Strange to relate she had kept her word! Her turn came late, but since Dash's had been Dash's such uproarious applause as rewarded and recalled the new performer had never been heard. Most

of its patrons knew the skirt dance mainly by hearsay; and it was a revelation to them when, with all the lights out save a glimmering flare at the door, a slight, rounded figure sprang upon the stage, clothed only in a swirl of mist-white garments, and began to glide and pose, to bound, kick, and writhe sinuously as though floating in the flood of changing light that painted her living picture on the canvas of darkness. Up, down, across the tawdry stage she moved, in perfect time to the wheezy orchestral tune. Now her arms went up and all the foamy garment flew as wings behind; then it swirled and curled about her yellow head as petals of a lily-bud enfold its golden heart; again a small, slippered foot flew straight up toward the ceiling, or a backward, circling movement hid all the pale pink fleshings in drifts of white silk.

"*Ach Himmel*! To think I did nearly send her away!" Dash said to himself, almost trembling at the nearness of his escape. It was a sign of great mental perturbation when the good man let fall a word of his native Dutch dialect, so anxious was he to be thought a full-fledged American sovereign. Long before the rapturously demanded encore had ended Mr. Dash had decided to make a

year's contract with the dancer, and to see that the instrument was as iron-clad as pen, ink, and a lawyer could frame.

There is a certain envious Freemasonry among amusement-seekers of the concert-hall grade. Dash knew he had no need to advertise his star: in fact, to do so would be impolitic. Other proprietors would hear soon enough of his prize and be, as he phrased it, "snooping around" to rob him of her services.

Besides, the dancer herself would most certainly "get a head on her" if she were announced on the programme in type even the least bit larger than the rest of his aggregation of talent. He would have trouble enough and soon enough without that, he argued, adding, strictly to himself, "If I can keep her six weeks I'll get all the champagne crowd."

The house upon this, the second night only, amply vindicated the sagacity of Dash. There were twenty numbers on the programme, eleven of which had been impatiently endured, and three more were due before "Mademoiselle Ellita, the Empress of Parisian Artistes," could delight the assembly.

Dash had pleaded for two appearances, but the

young creature was too shrewd; she had appraised to a nicety the commercial value of her welcome, and did not intend to cheapen it by a lavish exhibition of her art. So she was adamant, laughing to scorn even the threat of non-engagement, and proof against the seduction of five dollars a week extra salary.

"You're way off to want it, Popper Dash," she said. "If I'm to be the rage—and we both think I am—don't you see the chappies will have to come early for good places? Make 'em stay late to see me; they'll drink and smoke the more: sittin' is the thirstiest work a man can do."

"I believe you," Dash said, so struck with his star's wisdom that he thought seriously for at least a minute of giving her the extra five dollars. Needless to say, the impulse did not crystallize into action. "Mademoiselle Ellita" had been engaged to perform her celebrated fairy-shadow dance for thirty-five dollars a week, besides beer and cigarettes.

The crowd that impatiently awaited her appearance was a varied one. Men constituted at least three parts of it; the younger whiled away the leaden moments by guying Mr. Paul, the world-renowned female impersonator, who wore a décol-

leté corsage and very short skirts, or in affecting to weep over the vocalization of Miss Ella T. Montmorency, who was at least six feet tall, with corresponding breadth and thickness, and was lavishly upholstered—the only word which expresses it—in scarlet satin under white lace.

"Guess she parts her name in the middle to make it go round," one irreverent called to his mate at the next table.

"Oh, chase yourself!" retorted that person, "The T. stands for tall-and-tender, see? She wouldn't hurt a fly unless she trod on him."

"Or sung to him," said a third, whereat every one laughed, and the first speaker ordered drinks all around. Before they were brought in a pair of newcomers stopped in front of the street entrance, and looked in amazement at the crowded room.

"What the deuce!" exclaimed the taller of the two. "Dash must be the fashion! I thought we could meet and talk here in a safe desert of half empty tables. Are you in a hurry, Nibbsy? If not, let's wedge in and see what the show is. It's safer, anyway, in such a crowd."

"Lord, Jim! You know I've got all the time there is," said his companion, who was short, thick, bowlegged, and bearded like a pard—in fact

none other than the ex-Zulu who had so astounded Mr. Weeper. "An' as to bein' afeard," he continued, "says I, if a man don't take no risks I'd like ter know whar is he, an' where'd he fetch up to?"

"Heaven, perhaps," the other said. The voice was that of Lysander Bangs, though the whole outer man had been transfigured into a fairly good copy of the fashionable rounder. He wore evening dress, trousers freshly creased, had a monocle dangling from his button-hole, held a large silver-topped stick by the middle, and carried on his arm a light topcoat. Looking over the heads of those whose foaming glasses he pushed from their lips in passing, he at length gained a side table some four rows back from the stage, seated himself, and rapped impatiently for attendance.

"We'll settle things on beer, afterwards what you please," he said, as his companion began muttering something about liking his "hot and strong." Then for ten minutes the men talked low and earnestly, so low that only now and then a word reached other ears than those for which it was intended.

A listener, had such been present, might have caught such scraps as "the old spot"—"you dig

up the swag"— "I'll do the rest"—"a plentiful, a splendid fool." "Police"—"Oh, yes"—"but who's afraid"—"great scheme"—"cut the country"—"not much"—"good as a life annuity," etc.

Nibbsy, of the red beard, listened at first uneasily, later with enthusiastic assent in each line of his face. At last he brought down his big fist in such fashion as to make the glasses ring, and roared out:

"Jim, I'm wid ye—sink er swim! Ah! Wat it be ter have er headpiece sech as yourn!"

"Stow that," Jim said, with a half frown. "Waiter, a large bottle, and see that it's properly cold."

The bottle came duly in as the lights went out. Next minute both men uttered a slight exclamation, and one replaced his foaming glass but half-emptied. Mademoiselle Ellita had evidently taken away his breath. His eyes did not leave her floating figure until it vanished down the wing, and bedlam broke out to recall it.

Then the bottle was hastily emptied. Afterward Mr. Bangs sat yet more spellbound, while the dancer swayed in tune to music even madder than before. When she had floated out of sight, and hope of farther recall was vain, he arose

precipitately and made a rush for his friend Dash.

Half an hour later, Dash, the beneficent, had again lapsed into Dutch dialect. "Potstausandt!" he was saying. "Himmelspetter! Dot dude he threaten me—me—and he go away wid mine dance-gal, as if I was no good to say no at all. Oh, blitzen und donnerwetter! My good wine had better haf choked him dead! He come to spoil my fortune when I so good as haf it made!"

CHAPTER XIV.

CALVERT WARE'S disappearance had occasioned more than the ordinary nine-days' wonder. For ten years he had been in Wall Street, where all agreed he had the lightest heart, the most level head, the clearest mind of any man who came or went in that feverish atmosphere. So much was readily ascertained by the new clerk in Mr. Wales' office, whose advent was oddly coincident with Eustace Patton's absence from his accustomed places.

His fellow-workers decided in the course of a day that their new associate was not a bad sort, but was genial, obliging, free-handed in a modest way as became his small salary, and fully conscious of his place as one who had everything to learn.

Gontran, the head clerk, who had been with the firm since its establishment, was especially well impressed by the new subordinate, who was so quick and willing, and moreover so evidently interested in all the tales of the street. On the sec-

ond day the two lunched together, and within a week young Patton had the entire history of the firm at his fingers' ends.

Very much condensed, it ran somewhat thus: Calvert Ware, coming from Maryland to seek his opportunity in the great city, had happened to board the same train with Carson Wales, who was traveling thus deviously from Illinois with the same intention. Fate sent them to the same hotel, and an exchange of traveling-bags, each marked only with initials, brought about an acquaintance that swiftly grew into friendship. In a month they were partners—equal partners. Calvert would have it so, though his capital was exactly double what Carson Wales had brought into the business. Thenceforward they were inseparable; they lived together in bachelor chambers, read the same books, rode, walked, dined together—indeed, enjoyed all things in common with one notable exception.

"I always wondered at it," Gontran said. "Wondered if Mr. Wales didn't feel hurt; some way he was not permitted to become acquainted with any of the Wares but Calvert. Even when the Major came up for a bit of town-life, Cal—we always called him Cal—Mr. Ware didn't suit him

at all—Cal always took his grandfather to the best hotel in the city, and there the two remained until the old gentleman was ready to return home.

"I don't think Mr. Wales ever even dined with them. I know he used to look sick from pure lonesomeness while the Major stayed. The old gentleman never was in the office but once till he came up just after Cal's disappearance. Ah, that was a time to remember! Things had not seemed just the same in one way for six months or so, not since Cal, evidently ashamed of his selfishness, took Wales home for a Christmas trip. Mr. Wales himself has no folk of any sort; he was born an orphan. No wonder he looks such a yellow melancholy since—but that isn't telling the story.

"You see, Ware and Wales had been doing a good business from the first; a pretty safe business in fact, but nothing big. They cleared, I suppose, something like twenty thousand dollars a year between 'em. Bless you! The old man thinks nothing now of taking that sum out of a single little turn he makes in two hours! He's a long head, I tell you! Cal's was as good, even quicker I think, but he had some notions that don't square with the street's ways. Why, once he pitched a fellow out neck and crop who really

wanted to do him a good turn; let him in on the ground floor, if he'd help along a bear raid that was on. I remember Wales laughed at the story—he wasn't in the office at the time, but afterward he said:

"'Calvert, I'm afraid we won't ever make our fortunes if you remain such a Quixote.'

"Cal flung up his head with the merriest laugh. He had a regular April temper. 'Twas thunder and lightning one minute and sunshine the next. He rose and caught Wales by the nose, and I can hear him now, saying, as they two went round the office:

"'Poor fellow! Poor fellow! His wicked partner is leading him by the nose away from all the good bears that want to give him a nice warm coat with well-lined pockets!'

"Wales laughed as much as Ware; but afterward it seemed to me he sort o' fretted at the way we did business. Well, it isn't any wonder, seeing how the money's rolled in since he has been by himself. Carson Wales is worth two millions if he's worth a cent, and all made since that day Cal—but, pshaw! He'd give it all to have him back. I never in my life saw one man grieve so for another! He's aged twenty years in these last

two. He is lean, sallow, hollow-eyed, and not at all the same person he used to be. Before he made a million he wanted money dreadfully, particularly after that trip to Maryland.

"Cal?—oh, he was just the same; quick, eager, and always ready to make an honest turn; but unless all was square you'd better let him alone. The other fellows said he was better than a mascot; that any one else who tried to live up to Cal Ware's way of doing business would come to grief in a year, but all he touched turned out so well for investors that he soon had the cream of business and left others only the skim-milk.

"He was certainly doing well—not laying up very much money—he was the most liberal soul alive, but winning a name for luck and pluck that was sure to tell in the long run. Once or twice he and his partner came near having words —I never knew what about, but supposed it was their different ways of looking at business opportunities.

"That last summer the street went wild. You never saw such activity. Millions were made and lost in a minute. A lot of Chicago plungers had set in to boom Transcontinental, and Wales was just crazy to be in the mêlée. By the terms of

partnership neither of the two could make deals outside. Cal kept as cool and happy as you please. One morning he came in—poor fellow! it was the last time—looking just a bit worried, and went into the inner office. He'd been planning to go home. It was Friday, I remember; Cal had told me the night before that he thought he'd better give up the trip. However, something occurred which caused him to change his mind, for in less than a minute after he entered his private office the man dashed out, shouting, 'Give me two hundred—quick,' and as I was unlocking the safe, I heard him say to Wales, who stood by, 'You agree that I must go, and promise to do—what I have asked?'

"'Yes, yes,' Wales replied, and I saw his hand shake as he put it in Calvert's. Then the two said good-by—and from that day to this Calvert Ware has been as though the earth had opened and swallowed him.

"Of course nothing was thought of his absence the first week. It looked a little strange, but the second day I had to laugh in my sleeve. Wales began to play the limit before Cal had time to get well across the ferry, and the way he made things hum was a caution.

"I said to myself that Mr. Ware had put his

conscience in his pocket and gone fishing to give Wales an opportunity to play the wicked partner. He must have had the Lord or the devil, one or the other, on his side. The market rose at us—once it went as high as ten points an hour. The Chicago crowd kept on just as if they were playing bowls—money came rolling in and in—you'd have thought it grew on trees. And we knew it was our money as fast as it came. Wales played it like a whitehead, and nothing seemed to shake his nerve.

"That is, not until all was over, and he had cleaned a cool million out of those fly Western fellows. Never mind how, that would take a year to tell! I was wondering one morning how Cal would receive the news—it was time for his return, when Wales came up to me with a face like that of death. He held an open letter in his hand, from the old Major, which stated that Cal had written them he was coming home; but as they had not seen or heard from him since they thought something must be wrong, and would Mr. Wales kindly say what?

"Then there was a fine how-d'ye-do. Wales sent a telegram long as your arm, had the police, detectives and the Lord knows who looking for

Cal. And this is a pretty part of the story: busy as he was, and all fagged out, he went through Cal's papers, his desk, books, and all, though it took until midnight to do it; and at the last, after he'd done a deal of figuring and footing up, said to me:

"'Gontran, whatever comes, whatever is found out, remember that money matters had nothing to do with this—disappearance.' He seemed to choke over that last word. I felt sorry for him; indeed, I knew what was in his mind if he wouldn't say the word. And it struck me then how old and haggard he had grown all at once.

"But the change in him was nothing as compared with that in the poor old Major. We hardly knew him, though he tried to hold up his head and step in the old way. He had been to West Point, and so had Calvert's father, who fought with Lee in Virginia, and then went home to die in his prime. The first time we saw him all of us said how straight and soldierly he carried himself; but the next time he looked indeed pitiful! I took him in to see Wales, who was awfully cut up at sight of the old man! About twenty minutes later I heard a cry from the office, and ran in to find the Major on the floor in a dead faint. Wales did not look much better; but he helped lift the Major to the

sofa, and as he was reviving bade me call a cab.

"The old man caught my hand. I don't know just what happened next, but before I'd taken all well in he was gone, and we've neither seen him nor heard of him since, except once, when a lawyer came and sent in word that he had called 'on business for Major Ware.'

"What the business was no one but Mr. Wales ever knew; but somehow it was whispered round the office that he had come after what money Cal had left. Mr. Wales did not say so, but that must have been his business. My opinion is the Major fainted on hearing there was so little: maybe he had counted on his grandson taking care of him in old age. Anyway, I know Wales and the Wares are not friends, which is downright ungrateful of them! He has spent at least ten thousand dollars searching for poor Cal, and I believe would divide his fortune with them as cheerfully as he eats his dinner."

"Do you know where they are now?" the listener asked.

Gontran blew a cloud from his after-luncheon cigar, and answered reflectively:

"No—wish I did! They've sold out and left Maryland, though. In strict confidence, Mr.

Wales would give a good deal to any one who could tell him just how and where they are."

"He must be very forgiving—that is, if he feels kindly toward them after such pointed neglect. They surely ought to thank him for the interest he evinced in his partner's fate," the new clerk said, looking innocently at the other.

Gontran smiled inscrutably. He was much in love with himself as a raconteur, and felt that he had told his tale with a dramatic force which needed a climax of mystery.

"Mr. Wales is a marvelous man!" he said. "Even I who have been about him so much don't more than half understand the man. I shall always think that, if he would speak, tell all he knows—well, this mystery wouldn't be so much of a mystery!"

"Indeed! Why, then, does he keep silence?" the new clerk asked with an accent of amazed conviction.

Gontran smiled complacently. He himself did not more than half believe what he had so confidently asserted. It was refreshing, though, to see how well his tale had taken with the young fellow, who had no awkward prior knowledge of the matter. With half-shut eyes he took an

extra long pull at his weed, and said very slowly:

"My boy, in most of these mysterious disappearances there's something in the background that needs to be kept quiet. Poor Cal seemed to be as level as a die in his way of living, but you can't tell about men, especially here on the street. If Mr. Wales knows anything more than the rest of the world—mind I say *if*—depend upon it he is too much devoted to Calvert Ware and his memory not to keep the secret as long as he lives."

When the two separated the new clerk said to himself, "No, I think Mr. Wales will never tell what he knows, but there may be a way of finding out."

CHAPTER XV.

"AFTER all, the slave of the lamp was merely ready money."

Cecil Ware made the remark to her friend, Mrs. Dalton, about the same hour as that in which Eustace Patton was hearing the last of Gontran's story. And certainly she had cause for her speech: it was uttered in a large, low, quaintly furnished sitting-room, whose southerly window looked upon a sandy stretch that extended to the narrow beach of a little land-locked bay. Northerly the outlook ran into tangled woodland, above which, at least a mile away, a tall, solid-looking stone house crowned the bare top of an almost precipitous hill.

The two, Cecil and Mrs. Dalton, were at the latter's country place, of which Eustace Patton had spoken. Both Marion and Jack had enthusiastically indorsed Cecil's plan for the future. To her they said it was a most promising experiment. Each to the other they said it was a good thing, an excellent thing; it would give the poor child that rest and diversion which she so much needed. Six months of such a life would make her quite a

new creature. After that both smiled and looked wise. Between love, represented by Eustace Patton, and law, in the person of Mr. Weeper, it was certainly idle to think that her future would not be secure.

So in all ways the Daltons had forwarded the Wares' flitting. They had never used the old mansion's west wing, and were but too glad to have their friends occupy it. The place was very solitary. The house on the hilltop was the only one in view, and that had the air of a fortress.

But Cecil laughed fear to scorn. She was too happy and too busy for tremors of any sort. Besides, there were the caretaker and his wife, wholesome, stolid country folk, with a brood of flaxen young. Pending the arrival of Mammy Susan and Uncle Ephraim they would look after the rougher, material part of affairs, and would afford all necessary protection to the new tenants.

The proper arrangements for poultry raising cannot be compassed in a minute. As yet that part of the scheme was without form and void, save in Cecil's enthusiasm. Marion gave her a warning word the day of their coming down. She said:

"Don't tell Mrs. Backus, the caretaker's wife, that you propose hatching chickens by machinery.

If you do, she will leave the place at once. The good woman is wildly devout, and I am sure would think such interference with what she calls 'the ways o' Providence' too impious to be countenanced. She told me once she wouldn't live in town—all cities are towns to her—'for nothing in the world. She had heard tell that folks there made water just run of itself up in the tops of houses, 'stid of sinking in the ground to be drawed up in a well-bucket, the natural way, the way the Lord intended.'

"Jack asked how she reconciled herself to such an interference with the ways of Providence as a well-sweep. You should have seen her look of contempt as she answered, 'Any fool knows a sweep is no good without you take hold and work it: besides, it is nature as made the stone at the other end heavier 'n the bucket of water ye want to fetch up.'"

Cecil laughed light-heartedly as she answered:

"I like Mrs. Backus' philosophy; indeed I shall embrace it forthwith. One can be one's own providence under it. I wonder you did not at once recognize its advantages. Hereafter, when people ask impertinent questions, I shall tell them affairs are so because they are, and thus save the wear

and tear of my amiability, to say nothing of that of my invention."

"Even if the questioner's name begins with P?" Marion asked, looking at her friend so significantly that Cecil blushed a rosy red, but said stoutly:

"P, or Q, or W, X, Y, Z, it does not matter in the least. But if some one named Dalton feels inclined to call me to account, why, I shall say 'yes,' and 'no,' and 'if you please,' to whatever is asked."

In the delightful work of settling, altering, arranging and rearranging a week passed swiftly, during which Mrs. Dalton stayed with the Wares. Her husband ran down twice or thrice—not, he averred, to see how matters progressed, but purely out of philanthropy to relieve his wife and her friend of their surcharge of commissions. He brought no word of Eustace, but on one occasion talked long and earnestly with Major Ware, and at the close of the interview returned immediately to the city, although the young women protested that they stood violently in need of his artistic judgment in regard to certain matters of drapery.

Everything was in such good order Saturday afternoon that Cecil felt justified in taking time for a walk. The touch of spring had just been laid upon the earth. Hedges and thickets were

gemmed with swelling buds; fringes of ragged new grass shot up along the banks of the winding roadway; straggling plum and pear trees, growing in what had once been an orchard, were scantily bedecked with white, sweet-scented bloom. The soft, low wind blew off-shore, with hardly a trace of the sea-tang in it. Indeed, Cecil fancied that it brought her, instead, the scent of freshly turned earth. Somehow that breath of the fields, so dear, so familiar, brought tears to her eyes.

She was happy—very happy—in the present relief. Not until after she had laid it down had the young girl permitted herself to realize the full weight of her burden. Yet, in spite of deliverance and present joy, her heart cried aloud for her good brother, with whom had gone all her golden, youthful dreams. Where was he? The thought of Calvert, the longing for his presence, seemed more and more intense with each breath of the landward wind. Bearing him upon her heart, she walked on and on, unheeding that she was far beyond the boundary of the Dalton demesne.

The path Cecil was following circled and zigzagged inland toward the house upon the hill-top, whose many windows flashed back the rays of the western sun. Presently she came in sight of a

broad fence at least six feet high, and bristling thickly at the top with large, cruel spikes. For some distance the path followed its line, but there seemed nowhere either gate or door, or indeed any place of possible ingress and egress. As she stood staring at its blank surface, the voice of Backus startled her.

"Better be gittin' home, miss, and don't come out this way again, 'ceptin' you've company that kin take kere o' ye."

"Why? What danger is there? I see nothing to be afraid of," Cecil said, climbing to the road's farther bank and vainly trying to look over the wall.

Backus scratched his head and said ruminantly: "Don't know as I know myself, miss—that is, nothin' to name—'cept that there's a bad dog lives inside that thar fence—two of 'em, in fact—an' though it looks so high and stout they do git over sometimes. Once I know they most tore a strange feller to pieces."

"Indeed! Who lives there any way?"

Again Backus scratched his head before answering: "Nobody—that is, no rich folks I mean. Place did b'long ter er man that lived in York, but I heered 'em say he growed poor and had to sell

it. Sence then thar's been a furrin chap with 'is wife and er boy—and none of 'em can't talk like folks—it's jest jibber-jabber, jibber-jabber, wusser'n a passel o' geese.

"They don't go nowhere but to York—do all thar tradin' thar, though it's four miles to the station. Nobody never goes to see 'em, nobody 'bout here I mean, though several times a boat has run into the bay down thar, and landed a man who went up and stayed all night. He must be a furriner too. I met him one mornin' 'bout light, and though he said somethin', seemed to try real hard to talk, his words was jest like so much hencackle."

"What a pity!" Cecil said with twinkling eyes. "You must learn to speak their language, Mr. Backus, and find out what it all means. I shall half die of curiosity until you do. How did the man look?"

"Oh, he was a big, portly feller, with a long, red beard," Backus replied. "His hand was funny—the longest and leanest I ever set eyes on."

"What's that you are saying, Backus?" asked a voice behind them—a voice which held a note of shaken, indefinable surprise.

Turning, Cecil found herself face to face with

Eustace Patton, who took her hand and said, smiling:

"What good wind blew you thus far on my way? I thought it would be at least ten minutes longer before I came into your presence."

Cecil did not in the least think of the Backus philosophy, yet notwithstanding she answered:

"I am here—because I am."

CHAPTER XVI.

"I THINK I would better ask how you happen to be here?" Cecil said, as they walked toward home.

"Oh, I wanted to know about several matters," Eustace replied, with a half smile, and a look which brought the eloquent blood to the girl's cheeks.

"Name one, please," she said to hide her embarrassment.

"Well, then, tell me first what, upon reflection, do you think of our friend Weeper?"

"Mr. Weeper? Why, he's just an angel—only he has a long nose and no wings!" Cecil said with such promptness as ought to have placed her questioner's mind at rest.

But what lover, and especially a jealous one, ever reasoned where the lady of his heart was concerned? Eustace felt distinctly aggrieved. It was not thus she had spoken of Mr. Wales. If she began by such liking of Mr. Weeper, might she not end by loving him with all her woman's heart? She was not—could not be mercenary;

but his fortune and position were such as must weigh with any woman. Besides, she saw him in the rosy light of her own warm gratitude. What wonder that a note of bitterness rang in Mr. Patton's voice as he said when they reached the open hall door:

"Talk of angels! There he is, sitting as snugly over his teacup as though he had no thought in life except to learn how Mrs. Dalton brews the liquid he is drinking."

"Why should he have—now? That is the business in hand," Cecil said, with a little lift of the chin. "Mr. Patton, you are hardly fair to Mr. Weeper. You admit he is kind and honorable; you told us we could trust—believe in him; yet you seem to find something ludicrous about the man. He is a little odd, but mainly, I think, because so kind."

"Of course, if you approve of him there is nothing more to be said," Eustace returned in a studiously indifferent tone. "Forgive my impertinent questions, please; but can Major Ware see me on a little matter of business? After that I must immediately return to the city."

"Why—I thought—that is, I hoped you would stay over Sunday. Of course if you came on business——" Cecil said, dropping her eyes.

Even as she spoke Marion darted out to them, saying:

"Come in and have some tea. You don't deserve it, loitering this way, but I'm in the mood to forgive anything. Jack has come down to tell us that both his exhibition pictures are sold, and the purchaser has given him commissions for two more. No," to the question in Eustace's eyes, "we don't know his name, that is, not officially, but we will all, I think, agree that it is some one who delights in making a proper use of money."

"Yes, sometimes," Eustace returned gloomily, his eyes fixed on Cecil, who was certainly giving Mr. Weeper the prettiest of friendly greetings.

To speak the exact truth, Mr. Patton was more disturbed over this piece of good luck which had befallen his friends than he would have been at all willing to admit. Not that he grudged it, or was in the least envious. If only it had come from another source, or at another conjunction of affairs, none would have rejoiced more heartily than he. Eustace Patton judged rightly that Cecil had a passion for generous deeds. Doubtless she would be greatly tempted by anything which made her power of doing them practically without limit.

Marion, following his glance, read something

of his thoughts and said, with a faint, sympathetic smile:

"Poor Eustace! You look as glum as if Cecil were already Mrs. Weeper. Surely it is not possible that you allow yourself to be seriously jealous of him?"

"Why not — with such evidence before my eyes?" Eustace said, nodding slightly toward Cecil, who stood listening, with down-lidded eyes and a wavering rose on her cheeks, to what Mr. Weeper, in his very finest manner, was saying.

If Mr. Patton had heard, it would have been no great matter. Mr. Weeper had run out, as he assured Miss Ware, not only to see that she was well and comfortably placed, but to look after a matter vital to another client, who oddly enough was also a woman, and, more oddly still, almost as young and—well, as beautiful as was Miss Ware herself. Indeed, on leaving the city, it had not occurred to him that he would be within reach of the Daltons' country place; but finding himself but a few miles away, he had hired a villanous trap—the only one the region afforded—and driven over to ask in what way, if any, he could do her farther service.

Now he really must be going; railway trains waited for no man, or woman. But before leav-

ing he begged to assure Miss Ware, and, through her, Major Ware, that—well, that certain inquiries which he had caused to be set on foot, though as yet they had yielded nothing tangible, gave promise of early results."

"Oh, say that again! On your honor now, do you think—is there any hope?" Cecil questioned impetuously, her eyes two blurs of mist, her sweet lips tremulous.

Eustace saw and misread her emotion, just as he misread Mr. Weeper's reply when that gentleman, rising, took Cecil's hand in his and almost laid his lips upon it as he said:

"Trust me a little longer, dear Miss Ware. Suspense, I know, is terrible; but I fear to speak positively until more certain knowledge has been gained."

Eustace came striding in as the last word was uttered. The sight of him manifestly discomposed Mr. Weeper, who, however, greeted him warmly, then drew him aside for five minutes of eager conversation. Evidently he had something to tell as well as to hear. More than once he chuckled, and Eustace's black brows unbent so far that a laugh leaped to his eyes.

When, after a brief, comprehensive adieu, Mr.

Weeper climbed into his ramshackle T cart and went jolting away, the other lover said aside to Mrs. Dalton: "Please shelter me for the night; indeed, until after dark to-morrow. There is surely a fate in my coming just now, else how can you account for the way I fall in at critical moments with our friend who has just left?"

"Ask Jack. I hate riddles," Marion said. "As to staying, why I would never speak with you again if you thought of doing anything else just now."

"Please don't be angry, but I can't tell you the whole story at present; you shall hear it complete in a little while," Eustace said, following her along the dark passage that led to the kitchen. Marion stopped abruptly, exclaiming:

"Eustace Patton! You are too exasperating for anything! I left the coast clear, and here you run away from opportunity. Be off with you! Find Jack! Do anything that will keep you out of mischief until dinner time. Cecil has gone to her own room, and it's my belief you won't find it so easy to gain speech with her again, now that she has seen you follow me on purpose to avoid it."

"Anything I might have said would have

sounded stale, flat and unprofitable after what she has no doubt heard this afternoon," Eustace said, suddenly straightening up as though bracing himself to meet ill-fortune.

Mrs. Dalton gave an impatient laugh, as she rejoined:

"Jack is out in what is called by courtesy the orchard. Do go and see if he can bring you to rationality. I give you up."

The kitchen door had noiselessly swung open, revealing Mrs. Backus, who was tranquilly listening. Before Eustace could reply, she said, placidly:

"Mis' Dalton, you know God's ways is my ways—but that pore young Mr. Patton do look so healthy, and I know well he is so disprepared for the hereafter that ef what's he's suffering from is anything that breaks out I don't really think it would be sinful to try a tansy sweat on him."

"Thank you, Mrs. Backus; you're very good to think of it," Eustace said, with a gleam of fun in his eyes.

Marion sighed deeply, and said, with a solemn shake of the head:

"It would do no good, Mrs. Backus; the case is

too desperate and deep-seated even for a tansy sweat to help."

"Poor cretur'! I pray you may have time to repent and be baptized," Mrs. Backus said dismally. "But what a tansy sweat won't fetch out —ah, me—me!" with a shake of the head that expressed the finale as no words could have done.

Eustace hastened precipitately out the door and to the spot where Jack Dalton was slashing away at overgrown pear-boughs, with the idea that he was pruning them in most scientific fashion. Strange to relate, he found Cecil there likewise, perched on a big, bent apple-tree trunk and indulging in suggestions relative to Mr. Dalton's operations which that gentleman conscientiously ignored. At sight of Eustace she started as if to return to the house; but finding that he raised no objection to her so doing she stopped just outside the circle of brush which bore testimony to the vigor of Mr. Dalton's assault, and said, with a challenging accent:

"Mr. Patton, you told me Mr. Weeper was a lawyer not in active practice; he said he was down this way to-day on business for another client—a woman at that."

"Then I must have been disgracefully misinformed. A man needs to be exceedingly active if he makes a business of looking after more than one young woman," Eustace said, his face studiously impassive.

The next minute it grew indeed black, for Cecil, hastening away, had said, with a backward glance over her shoulder:

"I don't doubt all his lady clients worship him; they must if he is as nice to them as he is to me."

As she passed beyond earshot Jack gave a low whistle. Eustace said something under his breath, then added aloud:

"Jack, I could bear it if only I could hate the man properly. He's such a glorious fool and good fellow that the thing is impossible! At first I only laughed over his pretensions to Cecil. Now, confound it all, the laugh is on the other side!"

"It does begin to look as though your cake were dough," Jack said judicially, "but don't give up, old man. The tide in the affairs of men has, I suppose, its ebb and flow, like that of the ocean."

"This seems to be ebb tide, literal and figurative," Eustace said, pulling himself together, and smiling. After a minute he continued:

"Jack, I know you don't gossip and I must tell some one! What do you think? To-morrow night Mr. Weeper will bring his model heroine to find her fortune buried in the sand of this beach—under our very noses!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR even a rich man the upward steeps of fame are not altogether rose-strewn. Nor are such blossoms as nod temptingly beside the way lacking in thorns of exceeding prickliness. Like other discoverers, Mr. Weeper was not long in demonstrating these two great moral axioms.

Lysander Bangs had, however, no hand in the demonstration. His manner throughout left nothing to be desired. It was the exact mixture of deference and conviction that was balm to Mr. Weeper's fine sensiblities. Indeed, it bred in the gentleman such a trustful regard for Bangs that he did not hesitate to leave wholly in his hands all details of the nocturnal expedition, taking only the precaution to first visit the place and make sure that it offered sufficiently picturesque possibilities.

If Mr. Bangs had known the proximity of the Dalton residence to his chosen spot, it is certain he would have gone farther at the risk of faring worse. But having selected it in ignorance, and deposited the diamonds there under Mr. Weeper's

eye, nothing was to be done but keep to the original plan.

The stones were no doubt safe enough. Wrapped separately in a bit of coarse paper, they had all been huddled into a greasy buckskin bag, which with infinite trouble Mr. Bangs had managed to make fast inside a much battered boot-leg. That in turn was crammed into an earthen pipkin, which presumably had come ashore from the cook's galley at the same time as had Mr. Bangs. It was hard for Mr. Weeper to give up the iron pot; he was certain it would be ever so much more effective; but reflection convinced him that iron has a trick of rusting, especially if buried in damp sea-sand, and Mrs. Bascom's eyes were preternaturally sharp; besides, she took nothing on trust, and had a knack of inquisition that was truly terrible.

Indeed, it was with her that his difficulties began and ended. She was, in fact, altogether a difficult person—chiefly in that you never knew where to find her, unless you could tell where for her lay profit or convenience. It was Mrs. Bascom's habit to look at life and circumstances as pivoted upon herself. What does it mean for *ME*—what can I get out of it? was her spiritual attitude. Yet upon not infrequent occasions she sank into more than

womanly helplessness; indeed, into a pretty, clinging dependence which made a man forgive her everything. Even Eustace Patton, whom Mr. Weeper had more than once taken into her presence, found himself sensibly affected by the sidewise glances with which her long-lashed, limpid eyes made appeal to his manliness, his chivalry.

She was certainly an odd compound! Frank almost to brutality upon points that most women would think called for reticence, yet full of a curiously secretive caution which came to the surface in most unexpected fashion, as when, for example, the point of chaperonage was settled, she had made no objection whatever to the night journey. Mr. Weeper, anticipating a great outcry, had fortified himself with an elaborate fiction of times, tides, and the exact depth of water necessary to serve as a landmark for the buried treasure's recovery. To his amazement it was wholly unnecessary. Mrs. Bascom only said:

"I shall like that. I never have been on the ocean at night. Besides, with a chaperon I'm told you can go to places more properly at night than in the day."

"Ah! I see you will not forego the chaperon," Mr. Weeper said, smiling slightly. "Well—I am

happy to say that I have induced my aunt, Miss Weeper, to accompany us. It's a sacrifice, but the dear soul will do anything for me!"

"Isn't she an old maid? I hate old maids! They're so spiteful, especially if one is young and —well, not altogether ill-looking. Besides, as I've been married it seems to me my chaperon should be a married woman!"

"You have only to choose one. Remember, please, that from the first I have thought it best you should, as this is your affair," Mr. Weeper said, more than a little nettled at the slight to his aunt.

Mrs. Bascom laughed merrily, and said with her most fetching glance:

"Well, aren't you attending to it for me? You know you wouldn't like it if I found some one else to go with that funny Mr. Bangs! And really your aunt will do very well! You see, sir, I've been finding out all about you. I know you really have an aunt, and that you live in ever so fine a house up by the Park. Never mind how I found out—I know, and that's enough. I hope she'll be nice to me; any way I shall see what a rich old maid is like. I always think of old maids as being poorer than poverty."

"My aunt might have married twenty times

over. She preferred to devote her life to me," Mr. Weeper said loftily.

Mrs. Bascom smiled at her own wisdom in finding out the real status of her queer man of business. The means to that end had been a callow youth, who was a victim to her bright eyes. Inspired by jealousy and egged on by her own sly suggestions, he had followed that gentleman home, and by lying in wait for the Weeper footman learned all about the family.

Armed with such knowledge, he sought to persuade the lady of his heart that the tall heir of all the Weepers meant her no good. But Mrs. Bascom only laughed, assuring the stricken youth that she well knew what she was doing. Notwithstanding, a night's reflection convinced her that she might better make farther use of the lad. He was fairly well-bred and good-looking. She would demand that he, too, be taken upon the quest of treasure-trove. Then, whatever happened, she would be sure of defence.

Of course, nothing would happen except what was pleasant and very much to her advantage; still there was always a chance of mischance. With something very like a thrill, a swift vision of blows and blood—possibly even murder—suggested

itself. Real courage Mrs. Bascom had none; but of the calm feminine indifference to danger for another person she possessed a most plentiful supply.

To herself she said that she did not want a tragedy; still if there was to be one, she would greatly like to see it. This view was perfectly correct and harmless—even womanly. The world was her oyster, to be opened at the point of the pen. If chance laid bare to her eye its more lurid passions and emotions, who could blame her if she took an artistic pleasure in the spectacle?

But she said, dropping fringy curtains over the splendor of her glance:

"No doubt of that. Any woman can marry—the wonder is that any escape. No doubt old maids are much happier—the most sensible of their sex—but still I shouldn't quite like to be one. If I had to live my girlhood over, I would marry as I did, it developed me so, both mentally and spiritually. When marriage became irksome, of course I fretted blindly for a little while, just long enough to make freedom doubly sweet when regained; but the game was worth the candle. I have nothing of which to repent."

"Suppose," said Mr. Weeper, "that you had married a man so good, so devoted, as never to

have given you cause for divorce; would you have lived happily ever after?"

"No—that is, I think not," Mrs. Bascom replied. "I have asked myself that question over and over again. Certainly it was a risk. Had my husband been one of the deadly good sort whose goodness wore upon me, I must, I think, have taken refuge in suicide. Poor creature! He was devoted to me! No one could have been more so! Once I remember his saying that he never would leave home in the evening, if I didn't insist upon his reading Browning. You see he had no literary taste whatever—even went to sleep over Howells—though he would sit up half the night to read 'Mr. Barnes of New York.' I knew that would never do! If I was to have a career, my husband must have some sort of culture. I reasoned with him until we both became angry, and he went away to saloons and such places. I feel that I only did my duty, and really we are very much better apart."

"He has my sympathy," Mr. Weeper said, with a bow so gallant as to take from the words all intimation of sarcasm.

Mrs. Bascom raised her eyes to the ceiling as she asked:

"Will there be room on the boat for a young friend of mine? As you say, it is my affair, so I would like him to accompany us."

"I don't know—perhaps we can manage—I'll see Bangs about it," Mr. Weeper said, somewhat aghast.

"Do," returned the lady. "He's a nice boy, so obliging, and I have already promised him the sail! You must not make me disappoint him."

"I wonder if any one ever made you do—anything you did not choose?" Mr. Weeper said, looking fixedly at her.

Mrs. Bascom dropped her eyes, and a quick red flush wavered in her cheek, as almost under her breath she murmured:

"No, but—but perhaps it is because the person who could do so has never yet tried."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THUS it came about that the boat which in silver April darkness rowed past the Dalton house to the cove's end, some mile or two farther inland, was a trifle more than comfortably full. Besides the rowers, four stout fellows, with Lysander Bangs for coxswain, Mr. Weeper was carefully guarding Mrs. Bascom from discomfort, and Mr. Newman, Mrs. Bascom's young friend, disgustedly rendering Miss Priscilla the small courtesies he so yearned to bestow upon Mrs. Bascom.

The run down, in Mr. Weeper's own yacht, if eventless, had been very delightful. There had been blue sky, with bluer water faintly ruffling into waves and foaming creamy white in the wake of the trim craft. The wind was a bare breath of air and full of the April softness that lay so peacefully on land. Altogether, Mr. Weeper felt that the elements for this momentous occasion were living up even to his deserving.

At sunset the anchor dropped in the smooth water at the cove's mouth. At nine o'clock the boat was lowered over the vessel's side. The

moon, at first quarter, flung a faint silveriness upon the water as she hung low in the horizon above the darkling landward line. Somewhere in the marsh which ran down to the cove, a venturous frog creaked hoarsely. Mrs. Bascom started a little at the sound, saying:

"Oh, dear! I hate frogs—their noise, I mean! I never hear one that bad luck doesn't immediately follow."

"To-night will change the omen—at least, I hope so," Mr. Weeper said, pressing very slightly the protesting hand she had extended toward him.

Miss Priscilla sniffed audibly. All the journey through she had been suffering an agony of mind. It was but too evident to her prescient love what all this meant and whither it led. Within five seconds after presentation, she had mentally appraised Mrs. Bascom as an artful creature who would lead Endymion by the nose into all sorts of traps and pitfalls. Now she asked of Lysander Bangs, who sat in the stern, pitching her voice in a high key:

"How on earth are we to find those things you buried, with the night as dark as pitch? In all these miles of sand, too! You might as well search for a needle in a haymow."

"Have courage, ma'am! You won't be buried this many a year; at least, we hope not," Bangs answered, in a tone of intense respect.

Miss Priscilla sniffed more audibly than before, as she said, apparently to the air:

"Well, if I'm not it will be pure good luck! But what better can I expect, coming off like this on a fool's errand, and with the deaf leading the blind."

"Who is blind? Are you?" Mrs. Bascom asked abruptly. "Why don't you wear glasses? They're becoming at your age."

"I had reference to my nephew; but I pray that his eyes may be opened—in time," Miss Priscilla said so pointedly that her seatmate, young Newman, felt an impulse to strangle her. It made him fairly choke with fury to know that his Antonia was suspected by this ugly, rich, old woman of angling for her nephew, who was also ugly, and no doubt rich. While he was casting blindly about for speech in which fitly to defend his love, Mr. Bangs interposed, saying:

"Steady, all now! We must jam her nose hard in the sand, and even then there'll be a bit of wading. You ladies, though, will of course be carried over dry shod."

"One of them, at least," young Newman said, rising so suddenly as almost to upset the boat. His divinity screamed:

"Keep still! You want to drown us, you clumsy thing!" and she clutched Mr. Weeper's arm; then, beginning to laugh, continued: "Oh, dear! I hope the next fortune left me will not be hidden in any such place as this."

The boat grated dully upon the soft sand; a sailor leaped overboard and stood mid-leg deep in the circling water which spread between it and the strip of damp beach-sand. Before a word could be spoken Newman had plunged after him, delighted at the prospect of holding out eager arms to receive his Antonia, and of bearing her safe to land within their clasp.

Alas for such calculation! As the young fellow sprang over the boat, his foot dragged for a minute on the edge. He lost his balance, and fell face foremost in the shallow water with such a splash as sent showers of spray over both the boat's feminine occupants.

Miss Priscilla smiled grimly. Springtime though it was, she had been wise enough to wrap herself in sealskin against the chill of night. Her bonnet, too, was a close-reefed, nautical affair.

Altogether, she could shed the intruding brine with almost the facility of a duck's wings. Not so Mrs. Bascom. She was all in spring hues, dainty and delicate enough to be utterly ruined by this involuntary *douche*, which furthermore took the curl out of her pretty hair, leaving it in untidy streaks over her forehead. One especially vicious drop struck full in her left eye. What wonder that she exclaimed to the dripping suppliant when he rose to face her:

"Do take yourself out of my way, my sight, and don't come near me till you are dry, if you expect me ever again to speak to you!"

"The young gentleman had better steady the boat while we take her passengers off," Mr. Bangs said, in his suavest voice. Too crushed to resist, young Newman obeyed, and had the anguish of seeing his rival carried safely to land spick span and spotless, there to receive Mrs. Bascom when two brawny sailors had borne her over the ten yards of water. Miss Priscilla came next, her nose higher in the air than ever.

It was a crumb of comfort to the woful Newman to know that his mischance had perforce broken up the prolonged *tête-à-tête* betwixt Mr. Weeper and his charmer. Miss Priscilla now

glued herself to her nephew's other elbow, and sentiment or confidence was alike out of the question.

From the boat there was much running to and fro. A rug was brought for the ladies to stand on; cushions, too, if they should tire of watching the search afoot. Lysander Bangs, lantern in hand, paced mystically back and forth, counting his steps, measuring with the eye quite as though he could not walk blindfold to the spot he sought. The sailors and young Newman looked on in open-eyed amazement. The boatmen had brought pick and spades, but had no inkling of the use to be made of them.

"Dig here; I think this is the spot. The darkness, though, is confusing. We may have to try twice, or even thrice," Bangs said, shading his eyes with one hand and looking critically about him.

"Why, I thought it was dark when you buried the jewels, and that was why you could not find them by daylight," Mrs. Bascom said, pressing the toe of her foot impatiently into the sand.

"So it was, madam," Bangs said, with an accent of gentle reproach, "but remember I was worn out with five hours' buffeting of the waves. I should have died but that good fate sent me into this bit

of sheltered water—indeed, almost washed me ashore. I am as sure of my ground as man can be; but you must have a little, a very little, patience."

"Come here and hold the lantern," Mrs. Bascom said imperiously to young Newman, quite turning her back on Mr. Weeper. As the youth caught up the light, she drew out her tablet and scrawled upon it: "*The swell on the beach at night is like a ghost of springtime; the lapping of the ripples is like time's foot treading upon velvet; the lantern in that man's hand was like a comet run mad in a firmament of sand.*"

"What makes you so quiet? Tell us, please, how it feels to have a fortune dug up from under your feet," Mr. Weeper asked, raising his eyes from the well-filled spades whose mighty strokes were swiftly heaping up a mound of fine sand.

Mrs. Bascom replied slowly:

"I am not spendthrift of emotion now, Mr. Weep. There will be time enough in which to have emotion or form a sentiment when you place the fortune indubitably in my hands."

"Do you then care so little about it?"

"It is not essential—that is, I know I can live without it."

"What if—we should not find it at all?"

"Then I shall be certain that—that I have been tricked, and shall despise those who have lent themselves to the imposition."

"Ah! never fear that, ma'am," Bangs interposed, with a curious smile. "The jewels are here—somewhere, they must be, though I think we will have to dig for them in another place. I've stepped the ground afresh and find they were buried farther to the right."

"I am answered; you do care a great deal about it," Mr. Weeper said in a half-whisper. "I thought the little lady was not quite indifferent to pomps and vanities. Let me look in your eyes a minute. I am clairvoyant and would read your soul."

"You will need two lanterns in order to do that," Mrs. Bascom said, looking at him with an indolent half-smile, as of one wholly secure of herself.

Before Mr. Weeper could reply, Miss Priscilla arose, saying:

"Endymion, there is a limit even to my patience! This foolish performance has lasted long enough! Tell your man there," nodding to Bangs, "that he must either find this pot of gold at once or admit that he has lied about it. I want to go home—

what is more, I intend to. It isn't healthy for you to remain here another minute."

"My dear aunt—" Mr. Weeper began, but Mrs. Bascom laid an imperative hand on his arm as she said:

"Listen! I heard a spade strike something—something hollow, I am sure."

Her face was tense and white, her eyes dilated and seeming almost black. Swiftly she ran to where the stooping figures were wildly tossing wet sand into little lumpy heaps. Bangs stood upright, holding a lantern at arm's length, so that its light fell full on the space where the spades were flying. Little flares of light flickered upon his face and gave a curious Mephistophelian aspect to his smug features. His eyes drooped to the narrowest possible line, and he blinked spasmodically.

"He looks like an underbred devil driving inferior demons to dig up dead souls," Mrs. Bascom said under her breath to Mr. Weeper, who stood, flanked by Miss Priscilla and young Newman, a picture of astonishment.

Mrs. Bascom had a fine ear. She indeed had heard the impact of a shovel against hollow iron. The sand above it was singularly loose, but what was unmistakably the lid of a large kettle, so deeply

rusted as to tell of long burial, was now exposed to view. It had not the faintest likeness to the pipkin Mr. Weeper had seen Lysander Bangs hide in what was, as well as he could judge, the identical spot where the diggers were now working. Who could tell the vessel's history—foretell the dark secrets, the treasure it might reveal?

"Dig around it! Take it up! Quick, do you hear?" Mr. Weeper shouted breathlessly.

Lysander Bangs replied respectfully:

"Don't excite yourself, sir, though this is a find."

Mrs. Bascom's eyes were riveted upon the kettle which half a hundred rapid strokes released from its sandy matrix.

"Faith, but it's a heavy bit," one of the sailors said, as with straining muscles two of them lifted it to the surface.

Mrs. Bascom trembled so that she was forced to cling to young Newman for support. Even Miss Priscilla forgot to sniff, so contagious was the excitement all about her.

"Open it," Mr. Weeper commanded Lysander Bangs, who had knelt beside the kettle and was fumbling with the lid. The next instant he raised it, peered within, and said, without looking up:

"On my word, we are just too late! This kettle,

I'll be sworn, has held valuable stuff; now it is half full of sand!"

"Dig—dig—for the—the other!" Mr. Weeper almost screamed.

Bangs arose slowly to his feet, saying:

"It is hardly worth while. Whoever emptied this could not have failed to have found that."

CHAPTER XIX.

EVEN as he spoke, heavy foot-falls sounded through the darkness; and to the right, to the left of Mr. Weeper's party men seemed to rise out of the ground and rush toward the flickering light.

"Robbers! murder! the boat! the boat! Run for your lives!" Bangs shouted, dashing down the lantern and darting into the water. With suspicious promptness the sailors went spinning after him, clambered in, and sent the light craft spinning over the water regardless of those left behind.

So sudden, so astounding were these last occurrences that Mr. Weeper and his companions stood dumbly staring after the flying figures, while the newcomers ran to the water's edge, shouting loudly and vainly, "Halt!"—even sent a harmless bullet or two after the fugitives, to whom darkness and their strong arms assured full safety.

Mrs. Bascom was the first to find voice—a voice too sharp with white-hot rage to have a trace of fear.

"Of all the contemptible things!" she began, her

eyes sending out sparks, her form rigidly tremulous.

Young Newman had sunk at her feet, his teeth fairly chattering. Miss Priscilla had fallen limp upon the rug, with Mr. Weeper standing before her, in a posture of defence. Heedless of Mrs. Bascom's outflashing anger, he drew her a little back, and said to the newcomers who dashed wildly at him, now that they were balked of other prey:

"Well, my men, will you tell me what all this means?"

"Oh, my, but don't he do it beautiful?" said the nearest man, slim, long-nosed person who wore his hat very low over his forehead, and whose head was well sunk in an ambush of coat collar. "Although this is our first meeting, Slippery Jim, I've heard from my friends on the force of your talent as an actor. Really they failed to do you justice. You're certainly a loss to the 'legit,' but you shan't wholly lack appreciation. The State has sent you a pair of bracelets—and commissioned me to put them on."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Weeper thundered.

Mrs. Bascom began to cry. Miss Priscilla arose and rushed at the detective, screaming wildly:

"Yes, what do you mean—you—you rat of the earth—coming this way upon a gentleman while he is attending to private affairs?"

"Sorry, madam, to dispute a lady's word; but you see this is semi-public; the State of Jersey had some odd thousands in the bank when he," nodding toward Mr. Weeper, "cracked it. We've known all along that the swag was buried somewhere hereabouts, but hardly hoped for such luck as to catch our friend Jim digging it up," the detective said, while his three companions laughed aloud.

Next minute they spied the kettle, which two of them sprang toward and bent over, only to rise the next minute deeply disgusted at its emptiness.

"See here, Jim, this is a twenty-years' job—maybe even a life one; but if you will tell now where those pals of yours have gone with the money, it may mean a mighty light sentence for you," said another of the officers, approaching closer to Mr. Weeper, who, throwing back his shoulders, said:

"On my word, gentlemen, I'd like to oblige you; but I have no pals; only a lot of cowardly, it may be dishonest, employees. I really must ask

you to explain matters a little—let me know exactly how and why you are here."

"Jim, you are a daisy, a cooler—no mistake about that!" said the man who had first spoken.

His comrade touched his arm:

"Business first—explanations later," he said, looking significantly at the hand-cuffs which the other still held. "It is rather rough on Gentleman Jim," he continued, "to interrupt such a picnic as this, when he's got his best girl, and her mother, and big brother along; but the bank officers want that money—they want it badly—and I think we would better see about finding out where it has gone. Put on the nippers, then I can take this lot back to where we left the wagon. The rest of you, or two at least, be off and send telegrams up and down the coast."

"See here! You surely cannot mean to persist in this outrage!" Mr. Weeper cried. "I am one man against four—unarmed at that—but, by the Lord, you shall not do what you threaten to me—alive."

"Easy, easy, Jim! Be a little reasonable! No doubt you've a fine tale to tell; they say you can talk the bark off a tree; but if you are not the man we want, how do you happen to be here at this hour

of night with a lot of men who run away at our approach, digging up something in which money has been buried?" the head of the posse asked with convincing solemnity.

"Because he is the biggest idiot in New York City—except me, his aunt," Miss Priscilla cried shrilly. "Dear, good Mr. Officers," she continued, "we deserve all this for being such ninnies; but do please believe me, we are not thieves, or murderers, or burglars—though those fellows who ran away may be all three. I don't know how much money was stolen, but whatever the amount I'll cheerfully give it, if only you'll let us go and put us in the way of reaching home safely."

The officers exchanged incredulous glances. There was something in Miss Priscilla's expressive face which made it impossible to speak other than respectfully to her. But she had offered too much: it was inconceivable to their minds that a person honestly able to make good her words should be found amid such suspicious and peculiar surroundings.

The chief began to say, "You see, ma'am, we don't know you—no offence, ma'am—but we couldn't—that is—the responsibility——" when Mr. Weeper interrupted with:

"My good man, I think I comprehend your mistake, which is as natural as it is to us annoying. I came here for a purpose of my own—unusual, I admit—but by no means criminal. I—I—unfortunately used untrustworthy tools, to which I no doubt owe this most unpleasant predicament. If matters had gone wholly in accordance with my plans, a friend who could vouch for the entire honesty of my design would now be within hailing distance. Why he is not here I cannot say; but if you will permit myself and party to go, under your guard, to the house of a resident near by who is an acquaintance, I think you can be readily satisfied as to the character of this expedition."

"Whose house?" asked the head officer. "I've heard queer tales of some hereabouts. Dalton—New York, did you say? I never heard of him; maybe he is one of your friends; maybe, too, he has several more of the same stripe at his back. No. You see we can't risk an ambush—nor even reinforcements. Now be quiet; we must put the bracelets on—the evidence is too strong. If there's a mistake, you've the rest of time in which to set it right, but to-night we must take you to jail."

"That you won't, old pardner," pantingly ex-

claimed a voice, as a small, slight figure, and light on its feet, ran out of the darkness, and was resolved by the lantern's flare into the brisk little creature first known to this chronicle as Golden Slippers, and later as Mademoiselle Ellita, the star of Dash's concert-garden.

"That you won't, old pardner," she repeated, nodding emphatically to the officers, as a sound of steps and hard breathing came on in her wake. "You're farmers, that's what you are. Regular jays, with seed sprouted in your hair. Take him to jail, indeed!" motioning to Mr. Weeper, but not looking at him. "Why did ye wait till Nibbsy got de plunks and was away? A fine scheme that was o' Mister Jim's; he bragged about it to me—he's dead stuck on me—how he had thousands o' dollars that he daren't go and fetch, and more thousands in dimuns—ra'al dimuns ter hide fer him there ter come an' dig up, and how he'd put one on top o' t'other, then Nibbsy'd come an'fetch off both, an' he'd set ye on to nab the gentleman and himself get safe away before ye found out yer mistake."

"Yes, she came to us full tilt this morning with the story, and nothing would do but she must come along herself," said some one, who now came up

with the shield of the Central Office showing negligently on his breast.

"We wanted to be in time to nab Jim himself; Nibbsy and the swag were attended to as soon as they set foot in the city. But we got a wrong direction coming to this place that sent us miles out of the way, and let the rascal give us the slip."

"Well, maybe 'tis good riddance of bad rubbish," said Mademoiselle Ellita, known in semi-private life as Miss Laury Brannigan.

Certainly she was the unlikeliest possible angel of deliverance. What with haste and excitement her garments were all awry, her billycock hat tipped rakishly aside, and strings of yellow hair in unkempt disorder strayed all over her face.

Mrs. Bascom drew away in undisguised contempt. Mr. Weeper stood silent, by turns red and white, in fear of what she might reveal as to her motive for action. It needed but the parading of that faintly good deed to complete the discomfitures of this fateful night. But Miss Priscilla, after a long look at the girl, went to her with both hands outheld, saying:

"Child, the good Lord put it into your heart to come and help us. I want to kiss you; then let us all pray."

As the two fell upon their knees every hat went off, and the hush of reverent silence that fell upon the party was unbroken until they had arisen. Laury Brannigan's eyes were wet. With a swift, frightened glance at Mr. Weeper, she whispered in Miss Priscilla's ear:

"He is a good man! I—I know it better than most folks. I went to him hungry and wicked, and—and—he shamed me wi' kindness, and gim-me a chance. I knew I could dance—if only I had de togs—de wide skirt, I mean—I got it—an' de chance tergedder—an' now—well, ma don't need ever ter be hungry no more."

At the same minute Mrs. Bascom was saying to Mr. Weeper:

"You see how well it is that I insisted on a chaperon. If I had not had one, I could never hold up my head after this."

CHAPTER XX.

"THE question now is, how can we reach home?" Mr. Weeper said to his late antagonist, after a brief but pointed conference between them, after the last-comers had fully convinced the officers first on the ground of their mistake and its possible consequences.

"H-m! Home means New York, does it not?" the head detective asked respectfully. "Well, sir, my advice is to knock up the acquaintance you spoke about, and ask him for shelter until morning. Then, no doubt, you will find your boat—those rascals will leave it somewhere about—or else you can hire another to take you off to the yacht. It's miles to the railway, and over the roughest sort of road. You might have our team, but we've got to go on about this business. And the others say their turnout lost a wheel just 'top of the hill—that was partly what made them so late; besides, I don't believe you'd get a train before well along toward morning. The ladies certainly need rest."

"Yes," Mr. Weeper said. "In fact we all need

it. I feel more exhausted than if I had done a hard day's work sight-seeing. But I don't half like going to the Daltons'—storming them in this fashion. There must be other houses near, where, without giving offence, we could—could offer some return for the trouble we shall give."

"As you like—I don't know of any," the detective said, with a little shrug. "I'm a stranger in these parts—in fact, I think we all are, and unless I'm mistaken it's coming on to rain; so good night to you, sir; we must get out of this before a fog rises."

"Endymion," Miss Priscilla said sternly, "if you know anything, any place, anybody, that will take care of us until daylight, take us there at once."

"I'd rather not go anywhere; I'm sure I look like a fright," Mrs. Bascom said with cold decision.

"You could never look like anything but an angel," Mr. Newman whispered, so loudly that Laury Brannigan giggled outright. Mrs. Bascom frowned, and said more freezingly than before:

"Mr. Weep-er," marked stress on the last syllable, "I wonder really how you ever strayed so far from your auntie's apron-string as to make that—person's acquaintance."

"A man, dear lady, comes to know all sorts of people," Mr. Weeper murmured in limp apology.

He was truly grateful to Laury—how grateful she could not know—and yet burned with the desire to have her go away. The girl's presence was a standing menace. That she held the threads of all his scheme in her hands was evident, and she might at any minute unravel it, even before the person of all others whom he was most loath should comprehend it.

Anything was better than that—even a midnight intrusion upon the Dalton household. He was very angry with Eustace Patton. The young fellow had given his word to be close enough at hand to see and hear all that went on in the diamond digging. No doubt he had wilfully broken faith, lingering perhaps in speech with Cecil through the minutes which he should have given to Mr. Weeper's great enterprise.

Crushed as the discoverer was with the night's mischances, he had yet enough strength of resentment to frame a dozen sarcastic speeches for Mr. Patton's sole benefit. As a matter of simple fact, he confessed to himself that Patton's absence was not to be regretted; the outcome had been so ap-

pallingly unlike what Mr. Weeper had intended and desired.

But that in no wise altered the fact that he, Endymion Weeper, had granted a special privilege which a mere newspaper man had taken it upon himself to toss aside as a thing of no value. Therein—in the hurt to his dignity, his sense of what was due to himself, personally and intellectually—lay the sting, a bitter prick, and it could not, Mr. Weeper repeated over and over to himself, be excused, and would not be forgiven.

Such feelings are but ill company for a long tramp through darkness over what is almost unknown ground. Without the doctrine of special providence, it is hard to understand how the four waifs, stranded by Lysander Bangs' villany, at last found their way to the home of the Daltons and Wares.

A light burning brightly in the hall streamed cheerfully out through an unshuttered window. Though nearly two o'clock some one was evidently astir or on watch. At the sound of footsteps outside, the door was flung wide open, two figures were silhouetted against its lighted square, and two voices cried simultaneously:

"Jack! Mr. Patton! Who is it? What is the matter? Why have you been so long away?"

Mr. Weeper went forward with what dignity he could muster, saying:

"Ladies, do not be alarmed. We are not a lot of lunatics, as our appearance might naturally suggest, but benighted travelers who are forced to trespass until morning on your hospitality."

"Why, it's Mr. Weeper! How do you do? Come in at once, every one," Marion said, flinging wide the door, and standing beside it with welcoming, out-held hand, as her guests entered.

In the hubbub of greeting and presentation which followed, Cecil took instant possession of Miss Priscilla, established her in a cushioned corner beside the fire, removed bonnet and wraps, then ran to fetch a cup of hot tea and a delicate sandwich.

"We had them all ready," she explained, "knowing our gentlemen would come in cold and hungry. They have been away a long time—more than two hours; we were beginning to feel anxious; now, no doubt, they will soon be here."

"I'm sure I hope so," Miss Priscilla said, with a little shuddering sigh of comfort regained.

Mrs. Bascom turned sharply upon Mr. Weeper, asking:

"Is this Mr. Patton to whom she refers the one you brought to see me? It's odd he should be here—but I hope it is he, I should so like to see him again."

"What for?" asked Miss Priscilla, with a sniff so robust as to attest that she had very nearly come to herself.

Mrs. Bascom dropped her eyes and smiled, but made no audible reply. She had sunk down amid heaped cushions on the bearskin opposite Miss Priscilla's corner, and was holding out to the drift-wood blaze two hands, soft, white and full of baby dimples. Despite her pallor, her dishevelment, perhaps even partly because of them, she made an enchanting picture in the flashing, changing fire-shine that had lights of green, and orange, and spectral blue. They gave a weird significance to her small face and deep, limpid eyes—a touch of unearthliness full of magnetic fascination. Young Newman gazed at her as one spellbound. Mr. Weeper's eyes went furtively from Mrs. Bascom's face to that of Cecil as she knelt at Miss Priscilla's side, holding her teacup and coaxing her into comfort.

Cecil Ware's simple, wholesome, household beauty lost nothing by contrast with the other

dainty creature, for all the touch of strangeness which might be genius. Cecil had no ambition; all her world might centre and abide within the hearthfire's light. The other? Who could tell? She was a bundle of contradictions; even to herself a puzzle—but with promise of achievement.

Besides, Mr. Weeper was conscious that she felt he owed her much. It was really almost compromising to have ventured thus in his charge notwithstanding a chaperon. Still—how his heart beat at sight of Cecil! He would decide nothing hastily, but if only she would agree to be fair for him, life might take on a rosy complexion even without the seducing glow of fame.

Young Patton was left wholly out of account. While Mr. Weeper did not question that Cecil might say nay even to a Weeper if he did not please her fancy, by no stretch of imagination could he fancy her putting him and his possessions aside for this young whippersnapper, who was no doubt a pretty enough fellow in his way, but not to be named in the same day with Mr. Endymion Weeper.

Mrs. Bascom's voice broke upon his contemplation. She was saying to Mrs. Dalton:

"Dear me! This must be the land of contraries.

You say you did not ask why and where they were going? If he had been my husband who tagged off this time of night, you may be very sure I would have known all about it."

"Yes; but you see Mrs. Dalton has no ambition to be a divorcée," Miss Priscilla said cruelly.

Mrs. Bascom laughed again as she answered:

"Perhaps she would have if she knew how comfortable a state it is; but I see she is absurdly anxious over her husband's absence. I don't blame her either. After what happened to us to-night, there is no knowing what others may have had to endure. Mr. Weeper, you may go and look for those two gentlemen if you will promise to bring them back in half an hour."

"No! no! That would be useless! Utter folly!" Marion exclaimed. "They can be trusted to take care of themselves! Besides, he would not know where to search, and the night has grown thick. I was out a minute ago—you can hardly see your hand before you."

"Possibly that is what keeps them. They may have lost their way, and perhaps will wander about until morning," Mr. Weeper said.

Miss Priscilla yawned; young Newman, in spite of his misery, was visibly nodding; but Mrs.

Bascom's eyes had no suspicion of heaviness. Bending forward, she took a fresh bit of wood from the box at the hearth's edge, saying:

"Now for a bit of soothsaying. If this stick blazes red and clear, the lost ones will return safe and happy; if it should smolder, trouble will be signified; should it burn with a blue flame, death will be foretold."

At the last word she dropped the stick deftly in place, clasped her two hands about her knees and sat looking intently into the fire's heart. In spite of themselves, the eyes of all were riveted upon it, and they saw licking tongues of heat leap up about the tinder-dry substance that scorched and shrivelled for a breath's space, then filled the room with blue flame.

Cecil uttered a low cry. From where she sat the door was plainly visible, and she saw Eustace Patton entering alone, his face white and drawn as one shaken with the stress of a woeful event.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Eustace Patton and Mr. Dalton left the latter's home, it was with a firm conviction that nothing could make them willingly forego sight and hearing of Mr. Weeper's great demonstration. But before they had lain ten minutes within shelter of the wreckage which commanded the scene of his operations, both had wholly lost thought of Mr. Weeper and his enterprise in a new and more vital interest.

Scarcely had they comfortably settled themselves, before the sound of oars cautiously striking the water was borne to their ears. In the darkness they could at first see nothing beyond the water's edge, but in a moment they became conscious that a man had landed in the cove, and was making his way past the spot where they lay hidden. He was a tall fellow and very stout; so much they made out, peering through chinks in the wreckage. As he came nearly abreast of them, he stopped, felt for a match, struck it upon his boot-sole and lighted a cigar.

As his bare hand was outlined by the flame it

sheltered, Eustace suddenly started. When the stranger had gone a few paces farther on he sprang to his feet, whispering excitedly:

"Jack! Jack! As sure as I live that man is Wales—in disguise! I would know his hand among a million!"

"Then we'll follow him," Jack said, rising quickly. "My word for it, we will find it worth our while. I have known ever since the poor old Major admitted to me that Wales had said Calvert ran away from debts of dishonor—twenty thousand dollars of the firm's money, which Wales placed to profit and loss in order to shield his friend—that he was the key to all this mystery. If it had been a fact, to have told the old man and let him pauperize himself to make restitution would have been heartless. But as matters stand, I don't believe it! Wales' game was to strip the Major and Cecil of everything, so as to give himself a chance to appear in the rôle of benefactor—and after awhile of grandson-in-law."

"So I think," Eustace said, hurrying after the stranger, who walked rapidly as one treading a familiar way, looking neither to right nor left. A little space brought him to the ring-fence enclosing

the house on the hill; he pressed upon a section which yielded to his hand, passed through the opening, and went in without once looking back.

The man walked swiftly, so swiftly that the two behind had hard work to follow. Now and then he staggered a little, and raised one hand to his head. When he came out upon the flat terrace fronting the house, there was a wild baying of savage dogs confined in kennels close at hand.

No sign of human presence greeted him. Leaving the hall door wide, as he had left the secret gate, the man crossed a long, luxuriously furnished hall, and climbed a flight of stairs that ran up in a sort of lobby off the farther end of it.

The two upon his track followed, their hearts beating audibly. When they peered cautiously over the stair railing, their quarry had vanished, but an open door at the left showed them in what direction he had passed. With feet of silence the two stole through, and found themselves in a large, long room, with elegant luxury in all its fittings, and opening at the farther end upon a smaller apartment, whose door the man they were following was at that moment in the act of opening.

At his touch it flew back, and at the same moment that of the outer apartment closed heavily.

There was evidently a mechanical connection between the two, but that fact gave the intruders no uneasiness.

Passing soundlessly over the thick carpet, they stopped outside the inner door, dumb, breathless over what they saw inside.

The man they had followed tore off his disguise, and stood revealed as Wales, his long, lean fingers tremulous, his shifting eyes full of uncertain fire. With furious, fumbling haste he tossed wig, beard, wadded great-coat in a heap at his feet, kicked them spitefully away, then turned to the room's other occupant, saying, in a curiously hard voice:

"That's the last of mummery, Calvert—I have come to-night to end everything—either my way or yours."

The man he addressed—a tall fellow, whose wasted face seemed lighted by inner fire—eyed his visitor for a minute in speechless scorn, then turned and looked steadily out of the window as though he had not heard.

Wales went closer—extended his hand half way, but let it drop without touching that of the other. For half a minute he stood silent, then said, a ring of passion creeping through the hardness of his voice:

"So! you mean to keep your silence till it kills —both of us. Curse you, Calvert Ware! Curse the day you crossed my path! You stole my life, my soul—you and yours, then put me afar off in your pride! Let me see that mine was other flesh and blood than yours! I, who loved you so, poor fool, thought money would mend it all—if only I had enough, and so when the chance came I resolved to take it in spite of you, but for your sake!

"Oh, I would have given you the world—you and that—other! I meant her no harm! I did none! I have as good a right to sign my letters and telegrams C. W. as has Mr. Calvert Ware. If other men thought they were dealing with you, and so thinking went too far, am I to blame? They were bent on losing their money—I might as well have it as any other man. When I placed you here it was only for a little time, I thought. Surely, surely, Calvert, you must know I never thought to keep you prisoner all these weary months. I came—you know I did—as soon as the money was won, begging humbly that you take it all—all. No one knew then. A million dollars is surely a royal price for having been restrained of liberty less than a week.

"You—you spurned me, mocked me, called me

'robber' and 'scoundrel,' swore you would denounce me as surely as you lived—told me I had done worse than murder you! That I had made your name a hissing and a reproach, an offence to honest men, as that of one who had traded upon friendship to bitterly betray it!

"You see I remember—all you said. I am slow about some things, but your words burned in. I thought time would bring you to reason—just a little time! Then that old man came, and brought with him the devil! I lied to him, robbed him. All in hope to win an opportunity of serving—her. He is your grandfather and hers. He pushed me aside as less than the dust underneath his feet, paid all I claimed and left me in hell!

"I cannot force him—you—all your cursed race out of my mind! The thought of you, eating your heart out here in misery, refusing me even a bitter word, comes between me and all the pleasures, all the luxuries of life. I dare not even be charitable! I feel that I have no right to give a dollar to any poor wretch while maybe those two are in dire straits—cold, houseless, starving! To-night I have come to make a last appeal. Not for forgiveness, that I know is hopeless. But will you not let me send you away from here around the world—and

then you can come back to life and friends as men have been known ere this to do? I do not even ask that you ever speak to or look at me after to-night, or take more money than that which is lawfully, justly yours. And I will give all of mine in charity, as you may direct. I do not care for it now that you——"

"Stop canting, please," the man at the window said in a voice of unutterable bitterness. "I never thought to speak again with a creature such as you! You talk, though, of conscience; prove that you have one: acknowledge your wrong, your theft, give back that money to the men whom you robbed of it! Give back my honorable name by confessing before all how you took it away."

"Anything but that, Calvert, anything—anything!" Wales said, hanging his head. "Remember I have only my work, my business. Better a hundred times be dead than without that! And after—who would speak to me? Although I tell you it was not wrong—but men are hard on a fellow when luck turns against him. It is not the money! Oh, no! That I can restore and hardly feel; but leave me a chance to work. Without that—I—" the man stopped short, trembling like a leaf.

"Without it, you might be—almost as I have been here," Calvert said, looking about him. Through undrawn curtains, heavily barred windows were visible. That the whole luxurious house was but a spacious prison was plain.

Wales, following the other's glance, grew more sickly yellow than before. A quick shiver passed through him; he breathed heavily for a moment, then said, in his usual dry business voice:

"I said this must end—either my way or yours. It shall. Death is infinitely better than such a life, as it seems, one of us must make the other endure. One must die—and luck shall say which one. We are all alone here—I ordered the men away before I came. The dogs are safe. I have left the doors open behind me. Here is a revolver that has never been known to hang fire. And here is a gold piece. We will toss up for life or death, the winner to go out free, locking doors behind him, the loser to shoot himself before to-morrow's sunrise. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, that seems fair enough—considering you might shoot me and nobody ever be a word the wiser," Calvert replied, a break in his voice at sight of the gold piece in the other's hand. As it went spinning through the air he said huskily:

"Heads."

"Heads win," Wales returned, stooping low over the coin.

"Let me see," Calvert said, barely above a whisper.

Wales drew back for him, but said, chokingly:

"You might trust me so far, Calvert—for the sake of old times."

Calvert caught the coin in his palm, saying:

"With your permission, I will keep this."

Wales looked at him with a strange smile. His face was calm; in fact, it expressed relief. The tension of eyes and mouth had relaxed and given place to a look of sombre satisfaction. He said slowly, as though weighing his words:

"You will hardly need it. Go down stairs at once. Follow the path around the hill. Once outside the enclosure you must be your own guide. I will tell you, though, the city is not far away. That is perhaps why the searchers never found your trail. You were too close at hand to have left one. Then, too, this place had been as it is for years before you came here. The devil surely favored me in putting into my hands the spot where a rich lunatic had been sequestered. He had just died, and you took his place. The keeper cared

nothing who or what you were, only to retain his place and pay. Get away quickly; if he comes back he will surely try to detain you."

"Hardly!" Eustace Patton said, stepping through the inner door with Dalton at his heels. Calvert Ware fell back a pace and stood staring blankly at the newcomers. Wales glanced toward them; then, ere a hand could be raised to stay him, thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his mouth, fired, and fell dead across the feet of the man for and against whom he had done such fearful wrong.

CHAPTER XXII.

"We will leave him in peace! He has earned it dearly," Calvert said, stepping back from the poor corpse. In the exchange of hurried questions and replies he had heard what it most nearly concerned him to learn—tidings of his dear ones and their present proximity.

Hand in hand with Jack Dalton he went down the stairs. No word was spoken between them till the outer barriers had been passed. Then Calvert drew a long, free breath, and cried aloud:

"Thank God! At last he has brought me safe out of that living grave."

"Amen!" said Jack and Eustace in the same breath.

After a minute the former continued:

"Dear old fellow, how did it happen that your disappearance left no trail?"

"Wales was a prince of plotters, a conspirator born out of time! A telegram—forged in the office—stated my sister was dangerously ill; that, he knew, would send me off to Maryland at whatever hazard. And going made it necessary to trust

him with all the confidential information I had of the deals then on. He swore to do all that I could, or would—then begged me on my way across the river to see a certain sloopmaster and deliver a message for him. I did see him—on the deck of his own vessel. All the rest I can tell you is that I came out of a stupor to find myself in the place we have just quitted. Ah!" with an awed shudder, "that seems an age ago. Pinch me, strike me, do anything to make me understand that I am at last out of it—that I am not dreaming, but am free!"

Jack silently pressed his hand. Eustace advanced a few paces. They had reached the Dalton gate, and he felt that Cecil must be prepared for this unlooked-for happiness. All thoughts of Mr. Weeper had vanished. It was therefore with a shock of distinct surprise that, peering through the door, he saw the group gathered about the fire. With the sight came a vivid consciousness of all he owed to the immortal idea.

Cecil started toward him, then stopped, and raised her eyes questioningly. Marion half gasped:

"Jack! What have you done with him? How —where is he?"

"Coming; safe, sound, and very happy," Eustace said, stepping within. Then approaching Cecil, he took both her hands in his, and asked earnestly:

"Do you think joy could harm you?"

"What do you mean? Have you—Calvert? Oh, thank God!" Cecil cried, turning white as a lily, but rushing forward and throwing herself upon her brother's breast. He caught her—held her as though he would never let her go, and with a great sob that shook his frame buried his lips in her bright hair.

Cecil raised her hand and softly stroked his cheek, then led him away, saying:

"My brother! My precious brother! Grandpapa is here; he must know at once that you have been found."

. . . . . .

Of course, after that there was no thought of sleep for any one. Within an hour everything had been so thoroughly discussed that any of the company could sit comfortably and gossip with his or her next neighbor. Mr. Weeper was magnanimous enough not to sulk over the fact that the interest felt in this new recital immeasurably eclipsed that accorded to the tale of his ill-hap.

Neither did he scowl blackly at Eustace Patton. Miss Priscilla to the contrary notwithstanding, her nephew was not altogether a fool. Fate had dealt the young fellow the winning cards, and it was not the part of a gentleman, much less of a Weeper, to grudge him his good fortune. Indeed, if strict truth must be spoken, in his heart of hearts Mr. Weeper felt that Cecil was, after all, the person most ill-used. Without these pyrotechnic happenings, her choice could not have been in doubt; now, the glow and glamour of gratitude must perforce sway her to choose the worse one. But if fate had acted thus unhandsomely, Mr. Weeper would certainly play no ungallant part. Therefore, when Mrs. Dalton had brewed some very mild claret-cup, he gave and drank with emotion:

"Mr. Eustace Patton: May all his seekings end in successful findings."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bascom, sipping her glass with extreme daintiness, and looking straight into the fire, "that toast is out of date, Mr. Weep-er. Mr. Patton has already found — everything that he cares for."

. . . . . .

Possibly he had. Certainly he looked marvelously well content with life and circumstances

one day, a month later, when he ran down with Jack and Calvert to spend a country night and smell the growing grass. And of course Cecil—sweet Cicely—was there to give him welcome. She wore a new ring, too—a narrow band of gold with a diamond trembling on its upper side. And when Eustace drew her out and away to the space of orchard-tangle, the rest merely smiled, as though it were perfectly proper.

"The two are ecstatically happy," Calvert said, looking after them. "Plague take the fellow! I can't even grudge him my little sister when I see her face light up so at his coming."

"No; besides, that would be rather ungrateful," Marion said; then added most inconsequently: "Oh, tell me what you have settled about that poor, bad man's money! He must have meant to lose in the toss of that coin—making such a will—giving all his fortune to you and Cecil."

"We will not touch a penny of it," Calvert said quickly. "Indeed there will be nothing left when we shall have restored what he treacherously took from others. Wales lost his nerve and a great deal of money the last month of his life. I am glad, as there is so much less to worry over."

"And you are still resolved not to again go on the Street?" Mrs. Dalton queried, after a moment of silence.

"Never! I could not endure it! I have just heard that we may buy back Wareham. Please God, we'll spend Christmas there together; and I for one shall never again want to leave the dear old home," Calvert answered.

Out amid the pear trees there was no talk of ways or means. Cecil sat again upon the bent apple-tree trunk, and this time Mr. Patton leaned affectionately against the big bough that overarched the young girl. Something in her poise or attitude reminded him of that earlier occasion; he laughed and said:

"Cicely, it was here you declared your affection for Mr. Weeper. May I inquire if you still cherish it?"

"Yes—but why?" the young lady said laconically.

Eustace laughed again as he said, lightly touching her ear with the end of a leafy twig:

"In that case, you have my sympathy. I had a long talk with him to-day; can you guess what about?"

"Of course—Mrs. Bascom; what else could it

be?" Cecil answered promptly, the dimples playing hide-and-seek about her lips.

"Correct! But how on earth did you know it? He told me that he has at last made up his mind to marry her—in the interest of pure literature—as he is satisfied that under his guidance only can Mrs. Bascom's remarkable abilities be properly developed," Eustace said.

"Mr. Weeper means that Mrs. Bascom has made up his mind that he shall marry her. Why, that was plain enough the first time I ever saw the woman," Cecil said, with a little nod; adding, "It does not matter; married or single, I'm bound to adore him! He's too good for her by half; but then I suppose one must take account of the arrangement of the artistic possibilities."

"I believe that is the main thing—a model more than matrimony with each of them," Eustace said, his eyes twinkling, though his face was grave. "It must be a mighty convenient thing. If these two of a trade do disagree—why, each can fly for relief to a note-book, and salve the quarrel with profit."

THE END.